

BS

1485

.H6

Song of Solomon

MARGARETTA HOPPER

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.

Chap. _____ Copyright No. _____

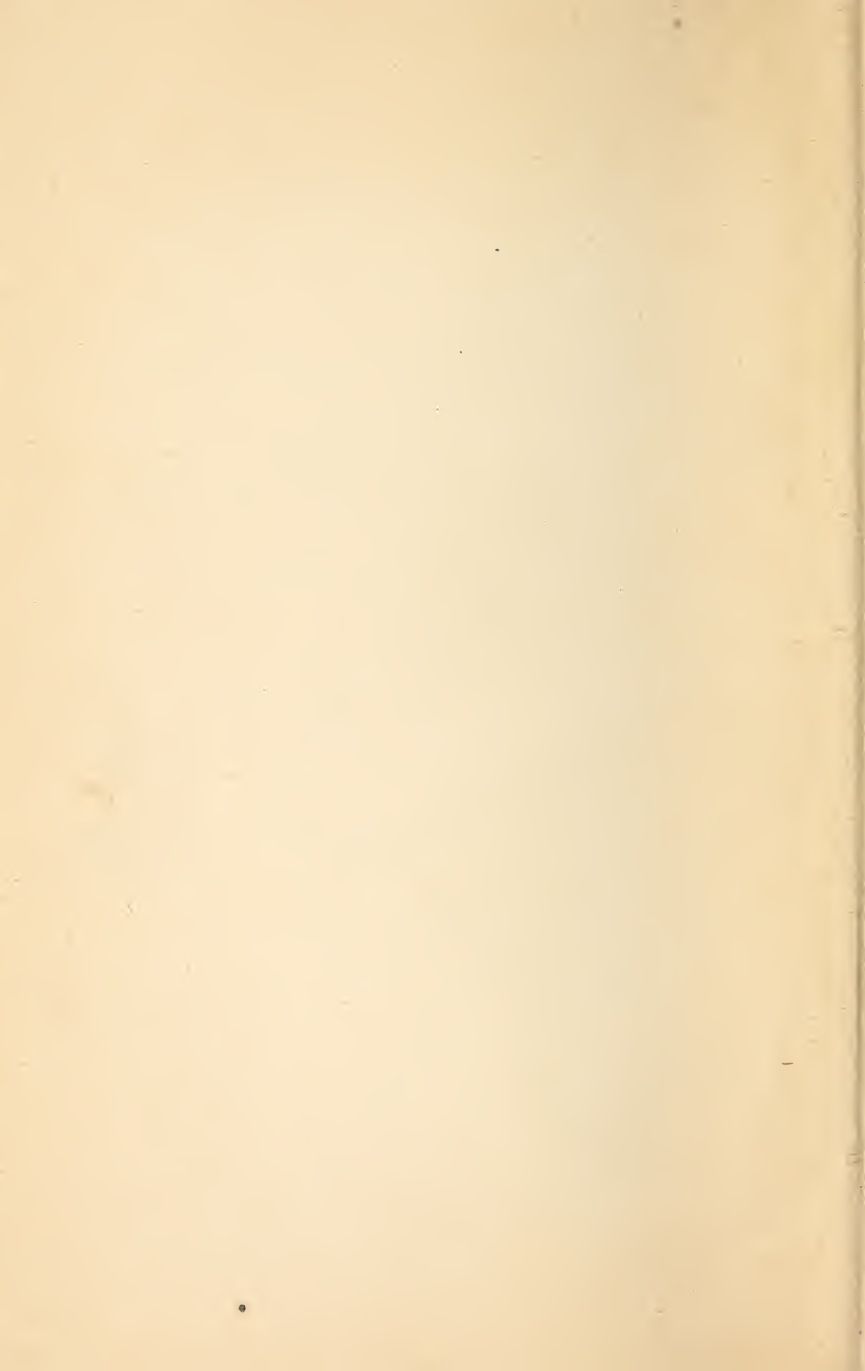
Shelf _____

BS1485

.H6

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.





ECHOES
FROM
THE SONG OF SONGS.

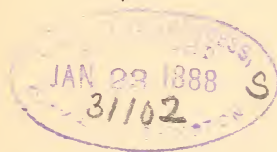
Books of Devotion and Consolation.

The Bow in the Cloud. MACDUFF	\$0.50
Wells of Baca. MACDUFF50
Clarke's Scripture Promises50
Bogatzky's Golden Treasury. Gilt edges75
The Empty Crib. By Dr. CUYLER. Gilt edges	1.00
God's Light on Dark Clouds. By Dr. CUYLER75
Smith's Daily Remembrancer. Gilt edges	1.00
Macduff's Family Prayers	1.00
Macduff's Morning Family Prayers for a Year	2.00
Macduff's Morning and Night Watches50
Macduff's Mind and Words of Jesus. Red edges50
Words of Comfort for Bereaved Parents. LOGAN	1.00
Shoes of Peace. By ANNA B. WARNER75
Private Devotion. By HANNAH MORE50
The Pathway of Promise50
Morning by Morning. By SPURGEON	1.00
Evening by Evening. By SPURGEON	1.00
Come Ye Apart. Daily Morning Readings in the Life of Christ. By the Rev. J. R. MILLER, D.D. 12mo	1.50

ROBERT CARTER AND BROTHERS.

ECHOES
FROM
THE SONG OF SONGS,
WHICH IS SOLOMON'S.

BY
✓
MRS. MARGARETTA HOPPER.



NEW YORK:
ROBERT CARTER AND BROTHERS,
530 BROADWAY.

1887

R

BS1485
.H6

Copyright, 1887,

BY ROBERT CARTER AND BROTHERS.

University Press:

JOHN WILSON AND SON, CAMBRIDGE.

ECHOE S

FROM

THE SONG OF SONGS, WHICH IS
SOLOMON'S.

IN 1 Kings iv. 32, we are told that Solomon wrote one thousand and five songs. This one is called "The Song of Songs," and it well deserves its title.

There are various interpretations of the meaning of the Song as given by different scholars; but the most of them see in its description of a courtship and marriage a symbol of the loves between Christ and His bride, the Church, whose full and complete union will be accomplished when all the Church shall be gathered together, and be seen "coming down out of Heaven from God," — which the apostle John saw in vision

when the angel talked with him, saying, "Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the wife of the Lamb."¹

As the forty-fifth Psalm of David is called "A Song of Loves" and is generally supposed to apply to Christ as the Bridegroom espousing the Church, so Solomon in his "Song of Songs" carries out the same idea.

As David says, in the thirteenth and fourteenth verses of this same Psalm, —

The King's daughter within *the palace* is all glorious;
Her clothing is inwrought with gold.
She shall be led unto the King in brodered work ;
The virgins her companions that follow her
Shall be brought unto Thee, —

so Solomon describes the beauty of the bride, and her attire, in the seventh chapter of this Song, and also speaks of the virgins her companions in various parts of it. Christ's parable of the Ten Virgins, in the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew, based on the customs of the marriage ceremonies of the East, may have had an allusion to this song.

¹ Revelation xxi. 9, 10.

The Song is full of Eastern symbols and orientalisms, and compared with the poetic expressions of those times and places in which it was composed, it is not extravagant. The scene of the Song is laid on Mount Lebanon.

Among the Jews a wedding was considered as a mystical rite. This Song represents wedded love, as the strongest earthly love that can be expressed. It was composed for the Jewish Church, and as God had entered into a covenant with Israel, and had termed it a marriage covenant, calling His people His bride, — “For thy Maker is thine husband; The Lord of hosts is His name; and the Holy one of Israel is thy Redeemer,”¹ — they could easily understand the spiritual meaning of the Song.

Solomon, according to his nature and disposition, in writing on such a theme would naturally express himself with the full warmth of the age and clime in which he lived.

It is probable, as many suppose, that Solomon wrote the Song in his latter days,

¹ Isaiah liv. 5.

after his return from his sinful course to the path of wisdom ; for when the Lord visited Solomon, as recorded in 1 Kings xi. 9, and reproved him for his great wickedness, it was for the purpose of bringing him to repentance, — for God, who had put wisdom into his heart, would not suffer him to be utterly cast off ; and although it is recorded in 1 Kings x. 24, that “when Solomon was old, his wives turned away his heart after other gods,” and in 1 Kings xi. 4, “his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God,” and in Nehemiah xiii. 26, “nevertheless even him did outlandish women cause to sin,” — yet in the same verse of Nehemiah it is said, “Among many nations was there no king like him, and he was beloved of his God.”

National sins receive national punishments. Individuals are punished for their individual sins ; but, in either case, when individuals or nations repent and turn to God, they will be forgiven ; but God will not work a miracle to avert the consequences that must follow the sin committed. David repented of

his great sin, and wrote many of his most beautiful Psalms after it; but he could not escape the consequences of his guilt; as Nathan told him, "The sword shall never depart from thine house."¹ Solomon's idolatry caused the downfall of his kingdom, but his soul may have found forgiveness with God; for judging by his Ecclesiastes, especially in chap. vii. 25, 26, and also by his warnings to others throughout the book, doubtless he had deeply repented of his great wickedness. The record of his restoration is given in Ecclesiastes xii. 13, 14, and he who had had much forgiven would love much, as Christ affirmed in Luke vii. 43.

The heart must be full of love to Christ to read this book aright, and to appreciate its excellence and spiritual import, or to be able to join in its fervent expressions of holy love.

Its beautiful imagery, peculiar to the age and country, must also be received in a spiritual sense; for we receive similar imagery taken from the person, the marriage relation,

¹ 2 Samuel xii. 10.

and many other illustrations in various parts of the Bible; for instance, the forty-fifth Psalm is called a "Psalm of Loves," which love is supposed to exist between Christ and His spouse, the Church. The simile of the vineyard, and of the garden as the field of the Church's work, which must bring forth its fruits with God's blessing on the work, is used in Isaiah v. 1, 7; and that of the vine in Psalm lxxx. 8, and in Ezekiel xvii. 8; and the fragrance of the vine as the smell of Lebanon, in Hosea xiv. 6, 7.

In the New Testament, in Matthew xxi. 33, Christ illustrates His kingdom on earth by the parable of the vineyard, which the householder planted, and hedged about, and let out to husbandmen, who must yield its fruits to the owner.

The simile of the marriage relation is frequently used in Scripture to show Christ's union with His Church, and their mutual love, as in Isaiah liv. 5, and lxii. 4, 5. In Ezekiel xvi. 8-14, we find the marriage covenant, the decorations God gives to His bride,

and the perfection of beauty with which He crowns her. "Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love ; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness : yea, I sware unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord God, and thou becamest mine. Then washed I thee with water ; yea, I thoroughly washed away thy blood from thee, and I anointed thee with oil. I clothed thee also with broidered work, and shod thee with sealskin, and I girded thee about with fine linen, and covered thee with silk. I decked thee also with ornaments, and I put bracelets upon thy hands, and a chain on thy neck. And I put a ring upon thy nose, and earrings in thine ears, and a beautiful crown upon thine head.

"Thus wast thou decked with gold and silver ; and thy raiment was of fine linen, and silk, and broidered work ; thou didst eat fine flour, and honey, and oil ; and thou wast exceeding beautiful, and thou didst prosper unto royal estate.

“And thy renown went forth among the nations for thy beauty; for it was perfect, through my majesty, which I had put upon thee, saith the Lord God.”

Thus also, in the Song, all the beauty and the decorations of the bride come from Him. In the New Testament, John iii. 29, we have the image of the bride and Bridegroom, as representing Christ and His Church. Paul uses the same symbol in Romans vii. 4, 2 Corinthians xi. 2, Ephesians v. 27-32; and in Revelation xix. 7 the angels rejoice in witnessing the marriage of the Lamb. “Let us rejoice and be exceeding glad, and let us give the glory unto Him : for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready.”

The allusion in the Song to the navel and the breasts as the seat of strength and nourishing power is found also in Proverbs iii. 8, and in Isaiah lxvi. 11; that also to the signet and the seal, in Isaiah xlix. 16, and in Haggai ii. 23. The likeness to “a well of living waters,” representing the gifts and

graces imparted by the Holy Spirit, and as flowing out from the Church, and springing up unto eternal life, is given us by our Saviour, in His talk with the Samaritan woman.¹

Thus we find that a great proportion of the similes in this beautiful Song are repeated in other parts of the Holy Scriptures of both the Old and the New Testaments.

Sometimes, in the Song, the Church of Christ is represented by a single individual, the bride of Christ ; but as it is a collective body, the individuals who compose it are sometimes called the “virgins her companions,” as in Christ’s parable of the Ten Virgins.²

In the Jewish ecclesiastical polity, the betrothed was considered in one sense as espoused, and could not be released from the engagement without a bill of divorce ; and throughout the Song the terms expressing the betrothed and the espoused are used synonymously until the marriage is fully consummated.

¹ John iv. 10, 14.

² Matthew xxv. 1-10.

CHAPTER I.

i. 1. The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's.

THE Song commences with an outburst from the betrothed of passionate longing for her Beloved. She is so filled with admiration of His majesty, and with love and gratitude because He has chosen her, that she asks for the natural token of His endeared love : —

2. Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth,
For Thy love is better than wine.

Of course she means the kiss upon her mouth. A kiss upon the forehead might show His great condescension, but would not express that sympathetic love for which she longed.

A kiss upon the hand was one often given to a superior when asking a favor, or in gratitude for one received ; but a kiss upon the

mouth is the kiss of love, and is the only kiss to which she could give an instant return, and thus express their mutual love.

His love thus manifested to her not only cheers and animates, but is more enduring in its effects than wine, which exhilarates but for a moment.

So the soul when newly awakened and drawn to Christ, longs for some token of assurance that it is accepted, and the heart leaps with joy when one can say, "My Beloved is mine and I am His."

By this nearness to Him, the betrothed inhales the odor of the King's ointments and says, —

3. Thine ointments have a goodly fragrance ;
Thy name is as ointment poured forth ;
Therefore do the virgins love Thee.

In the East perfume was always so greatly esteemed as to be considered almost a necessity. The attar of Damascus, the balsams and aloes of Lebanon, and the spices of the gardens of Palestine were all brought into requisition for the compounding of oint-

ments to anoint the person, and to perfume the clothes. They were also considered as valuable articles of commerce.

These ointments of the Bridegroom were the choicest of their kind, such as a king would use. To the bride they were more precious than to all others, because they expressed His love to her and His desire to please her.

To Christ's Church these ointments represent the perfume of His character and the sweetness of His work. They are such as cannot be concealed ; their fragrance is carried on every wind, and every one who breathes the odor is invigorated with new life. The nearer the Church gets to Christ, the source of this sweetness, and the more she breathes this unction of the Holy Spirit, the more the fragrance will permeate her. It is by this sweetness that the Bridegroom draws His bride unto Himself. Paul calls Christ's offering of Himself for us "a sacrifice to God for an odor of a sweet smell." ¹

¹ Ephesians, v. 2.

And His Church can say, "As washed in the blood of the Lamb we are a sweet savor of Christ unto God."¹ Thus all the fragrance of the Church comes from His Spirit resting upon her. Then His name is to her as ointment poured forth.

Desiring to be kept continually near Him, knowing her own weakness, and fearing she may lose the odor of His ointments, she prays Him, —

4. Draw me; we will run after Thee, —

the "we" meaning also the virgins her companions; thus indicating the body of Christ's Church. The world do not wish to be drawn to Christ. "They see no beauty in Him that they should desire Him." Not so His Church; but, as the bee, in seeking honey, is attracted by the perfume of the flowers, and flies in its pursuit with unwearied wing, so will she haste, in her eagerness of desire, to run after the Bridegroom.

The King has not only granted her re-

¹ 2 Corinthians ii. xv.

quest, but has brought her into intimate relations with Himself, for she says, —

4. The King hath brought me into His chambers, —
that is, into His own household, as one of
His family. She is filled with gratitude, and
testifies to all around the magnitude of His
love: —

4. We will be glad and rejoice in Thee,
We will make mention of Thy love more than
of wine;
Rightly do they love Thee.

It is not a mere effervescence of feeling which His love produces. When the Church's pulse throbs in unison with the heart of her Divine Bridegroom, His love fills her heart; she extols His name and sings His praises, and with all her powers endeavors to induce others to become part with her in her union with her Bridegroom. His cords of love bind indissolubly, and He is her exceeding joy, as David expressed it in the forty-third Psalm and fourth verse. To her He is all majesty and beauty; and while she rejoices in her union with Him, she also is humble in view

of her imperfections, as she contrasts them with His perfectness. She acknowledges, —

5. I am black, but comely,
O ye daughters of Jerusalem,
As the tents of Kedar,
As the curtains of Solomon.

These daughters whom she addresses are not supposed to be the virgins, companions of the bride, but, although of Jerusalem, are not of the body of Christ's Church. She tells them she is like "the tents of Kedar."

Kedar was the name of a conspicuous tribe of Bedoween Arabs,¹ descended, it is supposed, from Ishmael's second son. Their tents were usually black or brown on the outside, and were made from the hairy skins of their black goats ; but though rough and coarse without, they were often lined with gayly colored satin, and ornamented with precious stones, and so within they were "comely as the curtains of Solomon." Thus, although to the world the Church may appear externally without comeliness, within, the lustre

¹ Ezekiel xxvii. 21.

of Christ's righteousness radiating from her is greater than that of precious stones.

The very meekness and gentleness of the Church arouses the hatred of the worldling, therefore the world persecutes the Church. Isaiah prophesied of Christ, "He was despised and rejected of men."¹

Christ said to His disciples: "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated Me before *it hated* you. If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you."² Therefore His Church cannot expect any better treatment from the enemies of her Lord.

The bride entreats the daughters not to look with uncharitable eye upon her blemishes.

6. Look not upon me because I am swarthy,
Because the sun hath looked upon me.
My mother's sons were incensed against me,
They made me keeper of the vineyards.

They who were rich and powerful, or were false brethren, put upon her such laborious and troublesome service that she said, —

6. *But* mine own vineyard have I not kept.

¹ Isaiah liii. 3.

² John xv. 18, 20.

When the Church is working in the world to bring others to Christ, she must not neglect that communion with her Beloved which is necessary to keep her pure and strong ; for if she does not cultivate her own graces, she may become self-righteous or fanatical and formal, and consequently lose that rest and peace which His service gives. She must return to the Bridegroom, who not only says, "Go work to-day in my vineyard,"¹ but who also says to His disciples, "Come ye yourselves apart and rest awhile."²

It is in the green pastures, and beside the still waters, where the Shepherd feeds His flock, that she must seek Him, under the shade of the overhanging trees along the margin. This is the comfort and repose His grace affords. Where He rests, she may rest also.

Now, seeing her own vineyard neglected, the bride returns and seeks the Bridegroom.

7. Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth,
Where Thou feedest *Thy flock*, where Thou
makest *it* to rest at noon:

¹ Matthew xxi. 28.

² Mark vi. 31.

For why should I be as one that is veiled
Beside the flocks of Thy companions ?

In His presence she would need no veil, and
with Him she would find the peace and com-
fort which she sought.

As she repents of her neglect and her wan-
derings, He graciously shows her the way to
return.

8. If thou know not, O thou fairest among women,
Go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock,
And feed thy kids beside the shepherd's tents.

Her Beloved does not call her black, but
superlatively beautiful. All the workers in
His vineyard are precious in His sight. It is
the lowly workers who shall be commended
by the Bridegroom when He comes, and then
be called to come up higher, and to sit with
Him in heavenly places. Such loving work
He gives to gentle workers,—to feed the kids;
as He said to repentant Peter, "Feed My
lambs."¹

Obedying His counsel, her love revives with
renewed force, and there is a mutual inter-

¹ John xxi. 16.

change of endearments between the betrothed. The Bridegroom becomes to her power and strength as well as beauty. She says, —

9. I have compared Thee, O my love,
To the steeds in Pharaoh's chariots.

These steeds were war-horses, and were used with great effect in battle. The best horses came from Egypt, and no doubt King Pharaoh's were the best to be obtained, and noted for strength and symmetry. She adds,

10. Thy cheeks are comely with plaits *of hair*,
Thy neck with strings of jewels."

In the East the horses were decorated according to their owners' means, especially when going into battle. Chains of gold, with pearls and other precious stones, were then hung about their heads and necks, and by their value indicated the wealth of the owner; in battle they and their decorations became the spoils of the victors.

Her Bridegroom was invincible for her defence in times of peril, and able to overcome all His and her enemies.

Thus the Church looks to Christ as her royal conqueror, and through Him she will come off victorious in every trial.

The Bridegroom responds to His bride's expressions of love and appreciation, with promises of liberal gifts. He says, —

11. We will make thee plaits of gold
With studs of silver.

He will decorate her with beautiful ornaments; a golden band, fastened with silver, as if to bind her to Him more firmly. She shall no more be called black. No persecution shall be able to drive her from Him.

The bride shows her love and gratitude in return, by giving offerings to Him. Thus —

12. While the King sat at His table,
My spikenard sent forth its fragrance.

It was the custom in the East to perfume with aromatics a distinguished guest. Spikenard was the kind of precious ointment Mary used when she anointed Jesus, while sitting in the midst of the guests. "Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very

costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair : and the house was filled with the odor of the ointment.”¹ This costly ointment is supposed by some scholars to be made from the plant *Valeriana Jattamansi*, and was imported from the mountains of India which overhang the Ganges. Roberts says, “ The aroma is found principally in the roots of the plant, and when bruised or trampled upon, the air is filled with its fragrance.” It is a fit emblem of the Church, which when persecuted exhibits more abounding virtues.

As this costly perfume was no mean gift which the bride, through love, bestowed upon her guest, so the more the Church loves Christ, the more ready she will be to give Him the best she has. He comes to her perfumed with “goodly fragrance” poured forth in rich abundance ; and when He sits with her at His table, then her gifts to Him should be most generous. There will be no need to publish what she does ; her spikenard will send forth

¹ John xii. 3.

its fragrance, as surely as His presence will be known by the odor of His name.

Her Bridegroom's loving words have drawn her closer to Him. He is to her as the source of all excellence, and a treasure nearest her heart; as she says, —

13. My Beloved is unto me *as* a bundle of myrrh,
That lieth betwixt my breasts.

A sprig of myrrh, among Eastern women, was a favorite flower to wear in the bosom. Its perfume was considered as a purifier, and conducive to health. Myrrh was one of the ingredients of the holy anointing oil,¹ and also one of the gifts which the wise men of the East brought to Jesus soon after His birth.²

She also compares Him to another flower full of fragrance and meaning : —

14. My Beloved is unto me *as* a cluster of henna
flowers
In the vineyards of En-gedi.

"Henna," in the margin, is "copher," — the same word, Matthew Henry says, that

¹ Exodus xxx. 23.

² Matthew ii. 11.

signifies atonement or propitiation. Others translate it "cypress," an odoriferous plant growing in the regions of Judea. But whatever the word means, her Beloved was to her, as Christ is to His Church, that which all these beautiful and fragrant clusters expressed, — sweetness, delight, health, purification, atonement, and a comfort in darkness and trials, as well as the source of all joy and prosperity.

In such a nearness to the bridegroom He sees her beauty more perfectly, and commends her : —

15. Behold, thou art fair, my love ; behold,
thou art fair.

He repeats it, as if to give her a double assurance of his appreciation, then adds, —

15. Thine eyes are as doves.

Her eyes, those windows of her soul, express the character within, — gentle, loving, harmless ; not the eyes of which Solomon speaks that cause sorrow,¹ but the eyes of a

¹ Proverbs x. 10.

dove, the most affectionate and endearing of fowls. The dove was the form the Holy Ghost took when He descended upon our Saviour at His baptism. "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon Him."¹ It was also the fowl chosen of God, on account of its innocence and purity, to be offered in sacrifice: "And if his oblation to the Lord be a burnt-offering of fowls, then he shall offer his oblation of turtle-doves, or of young pigeons."²

The Bridegroom's compliments are returned by the bride: —

16. Behold, Thou art fair, my Beloved, yea,
pleasant:
Also our couch is green.

To her He is not only beautiful in his person, but also pleasant in His converse with her, and she appreciates the generous provision He has made for her. Our place of rest, it is green, an emblem of freshness and constancy, and the "our" expresses a union of ownership.

¹ John i. 32.

² Leviticus i. 14.

Christ and His Church are one. He has exalted her to high esteem, and she rejoices in His excellency, and can say, "Who is like Thee, glorious in holiness?"¹

17. The beams of our house are cedars,
And our rafters are firs."

The cedars of Lebanon were grand, mighty trees, slow of growth, with wide-spreading branches, and were firmly rooted and strong, and fit for beams and planks, as Solomon proved in building the temple;² and we find he also took the fir-tree for boards. He used these woods because of their strength, hardness, and lasting properties. It is said that the durability of the cedar has been proved by a temple of Apollo at Utica, whose beams, made of Numidian cedar, had lasted 1,170 years. These woods were also used, on account of their antiseptic qualities, as a symbol of purification.³ What beauty and health-giving joy, in the habitation where He will dwell with His bride!

¹ Exodus. xv. 11. ² 1 Kings vi. 9, 10, 15. ³ Numbers xix. 6.

The bride may have been sitting with her Beloved in the forest of Lebanon, and there pictured their house to be like their surroundings, — the trees their roof, and the grass their couch. Dr. W. M. Thomson when describing the cedars of Lebanon says also, “One is delighted with the verdant floors spread around their trunks.”

The whole earth is God’s footstool, and wherever Christ meets His Church, there is His temple. “How amiable are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts !” ¹

When Christ was building His gospel temple with His disciples, He did not build it of the graceful willow, or of the flowering shrubs ; but He laid the beams of sturdy, durable cedar. He chose His timber from among the honest, hardy laborers, whose daily toil made them capable of endurance, whose habits of industry and frugality made them thrifty, and whose dependence gave them forecast and trust. He made them His chosen companions ; with Him they

¹ Psalms lxxxiv. 1.

breathed the air of the Delectable Mountains, and were invigorated with life. The Church which He was building was not to spring up like Jonah's gourd, which came up in a night and perished in a night ; but its growth was to be slow, that it might be compact and firm, to last forever, and fill the earth with its fragrance.

CHAPTER II.

WE can imagine the bride and her affianced sitting on the greensward under the cedars and firs of Lebanon, and as they look down upon the plain of Sharon before them, beautiful as Carmel, they see its gardens of roses, and in the valleys the lilies in bloom, with their purple robes and golden centres ; and the Bridegroom, pointing to them, says —

ii. 1. I am a rose of Sharon,
And a lily of the valleys.

As we carry our thoughts forward of this period, to the advent of our Lord, we see Christ, while preaching on the Mount, attracted by, it is thought, the same kind of beautiful lilies in the valley before Him, receiving their light and beauty from the rays of the sun ; and pointing them out to

His disciples, He uses them as an illustration of His subject, and says, that "even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these."¹

The rose is esteemed the chief of all flowers, and is called "the plant of love;" it is said that the Eastern people, even to the present day, are fond of this image. The plain of Sharon is a district of the Holy Land lying on the east of Jordan. This rose, which takes its name from the plain where it grew, is the most fragrant of all roses; large fields of them are still cultivated for the extraction of the attar. The Bridegroom, therefore, in calling Himself a rose of Sharon, declares Himself to be the chief of all fragrance.

The lily of the valley to which He alludes is most purely beautiful, and is thought by many to be the *Iris reticulosa*, growing among the wild thorns in the valleys; its abundant growth and lowly place represent His condescending love, and His fulness and sufficiency.

¹ Matthew vi. 29.

The lily is an emblem of purity. In ancient Egypt the lotos was considered sacred to light. Christ is the Light of the world, and the lily is an emblem of Him. Probably as a symbol of purity it was the form used in much of the ornamental work about the temple, and on the dress of the High-priest.

The Bridegroom, still looking at the lilies of the valley in their royal purple dress, and noting the contrast to the ugly thorns among which they grew, says to His bride, —

2. As a lily among thorns,
So is my love among the daughters.

Like Himself she is clothed in royalty, and compared with her the daughters of the world are but thorns and briers. Though the lily grows among the thorns, overtopped and in a measure obscured by them, its purity is still preserved intact; and its beauty seems all the greater by its position among the hurtful and ugly thorns.

Christ's Church, though in the world, is not of the world; its thorns and briers may

threaten to cover and overshadow her, but the light and warmth of Christ's face shining upon her will impart to her brightness and beauty, and will clothe her in His robe of righteousness, by which she will be known when He comes to claim her.

While the betrothed is to her Beloved as the lowly flower of the valley in its beauty and purity, He is to her as the choicest of the trees of the wood, and is not only shadowing, but also fruitful and beautiful.

3. As the apple-tree among the trees of the wood,
So is my Beloved among the sons.

He is superior in all excellence. By many translators the apple-tree to which she refers is the citron-tree, which, a writer says, is "an umbrageous evergreen of exquisite odor, loaded with gold-colored fruit." They are such as Solomon mentions in Proverbs, calling them "apples of gold."¹ The leaves of the tree are of a bright rich green, and its spreading branches give shelter from the midday

¹ Proverbs xxv. 11.

heat. "The trees of the wood," though noble and stately, cannot equal it in beauty and refreshing power; and so among the sons of men is her Beloved, pre-eminently the perfection of all that is grand and beautiful, as she testifies : —

3. I sat down under His shadow with great delight,
And His fruit was sweet to my taste.

There is no end to the blessings which He bestows upon His chosen. He delights in her because she is like Him; she conforms to His tastes; she takes pleasure in the joys He has provided, and is grateful for His love. In His companionship she enjoyed the beauties of nature, the air of the mountain gave her life, and His fruit was sweet to her taste. He knew all her needs, and before she asked He supplied them. She says, —

4. He brought me to the banqueting house.

There she might partake still more of His bounty.

This feast to which He brings her is a fore-taste of the feast above; and so "shall the

Lord of hosts make unto all peoples a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined.”¹

While she is thus refreshed and cheered by the gifts of His love, she feels the satisfaction of rest and security under His protecting care, as He is also her standard-bearer, as she expresses it, —

4. And His banner over me was love.

It was not the banner of some great earthly warrior, represented by some wild beast that would tear in pieces all who opposed him; but the device of His banner was “Love.” By this ensign He always conquers. These exhibitions of His love have overpowered her by such a fulness of joy, that “her soul has fainted within her,” and she asks for some reviving cordial: —

5. Stay ye me with raisins, comfort me with apples :
For I am sick of love.

¹ Isaiah xxv. 6.

As the Queen of Sheba who was so overcome by seeing the glory of Solomon's court that "there was no more spirit in her,"¹ so His affianced prays for strength, that she may not sink under the effects of such ecstatic love.

Feeling her strength returning, she thus expresses her assurance of His sustaining power : —

6. His left hand *is* under my head,
And His right hand doth embrace me.

His loving arms support her, and she is revived and comforted.

Christ's left hand is underneath His Church to bear her up under her greatest burdens, and His right hand round about her to shield her from all harm, and to give her confidence in Him.

The affianced, fearing that such sweet communion with her Beloved might be interrupted, and He be led to hasten His departure, says : —

7. I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
By the roes, and by the hinds of the field, —

¹ 1 Kings x. 5.

those pleasant animals, who are timid, and soft and gentle in their approach, — I adjure you to imitate them, and to be kind and loving toward each other, and do not disturb our intercourse by bringing in anything that is harsh or discordant, —

7. That ye stir not up nor awake my Love,
Until He please.

As the betrothed had not yet reached the full fruition of wedded life, and this part of the Song represents the courtship, her Beloved has left her for a time, and she is now watching for His return. Her ears are open to hear His voice ; she listens for His lightest footfall. Hark ! it is

8. The voice of my Beloved ! behold, He cometh,
Leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills.

It is not the voice of a stranger that she hears ; love is always quick to detect the voice of its beloved.

Thus joyfully and speedily will Christ come to His Church when she feels her need of Him.

Her Beloved found no difficulties insurmountable to Him, when He would come to His betrothed ; even mountains were nothing in His way. He comes with the swiftness of the gazelle.

9. My Beloved is like a roe, or a young hart ;
Behold, He standeth behind our wall,
He looketh in at the windows,
He sheweth Himself through the lattice.

As these gentle animals study the disposition of people toward them, and peep from behind the walls to see if they may venture further, so He is like them, looking in at the windows, lover-like, to see if she is watching for Him. By His gentle spirit He is wooing her to follow Him. She hears His call ; but holds back timidly.

10. My Beloved spake, and said unto me,
Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.

Thus the Church when reviving from her lethargy feels her unworthiness to have so glorious a Bridegroom, and holds back, drooping and fearful.

Her Beloved continues calling in His gentle manner, cheering her by telling her that it is time for rejoicing.

11. For, lo, the winter is past,
The rain is over and gone;
12. The flowers appear on the earth;
The time of the singing *of birds* is come,
And the voice of the turtle is heard in our land.

The flowers are filling the air with fragrance and the eye with beauty. The spring-time breaking forth is as the butterfly coming out of its chrysalis like a new creation, full of brightness and freshness, rejoicing like a new-born soul. When the spring arrives, and the cold rains are over, and the sun breaks through the clouds, the little birds come out of their hiding-places, forgetting all the cold winter that has passed with its darkness and privations, and rejoicing in the warm sunshine, commence their songs as if in praise and thanksgiving to their Creator. And should not Christ's Church, when the winter of cold with darkness and trials has passed, and the spring of Christ's brightness

and sunshine is upon her, forget the things that are behind, and come out from her hidings with songs of thanksgiving and joy? For where would be her gratitude for the blessings of the present if she brooded over the trials of the past?

The turtle-dove, in the East, is one of the first harbingers of spring. Says a writer in Smith's Dictionary: "While other songsters are heard chiefly in the morning, or only at intervals during the day, the turtle-dove immediately on its arrival pours forth from every garden, grove, and wooded hill its melancholy yet soothing ditty unceasingly from early dawn till sunset."

Her Beloved still joins His voice to the voice of Nature, inviting her to partake of its offerings:—

13. The fig-tree ripeneth her green figs,
And the vines are in blossom,
They give forth their fragrance.
Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.

The spring is advanced, everything is revived, and the work in the vineyard is waiting.

As she timidly holds back He encourages her to come out of her secret places by commending that which is lovely in her :—

14. O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in
the covert of the steep place,
Let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy
voice ;
For sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is
comely.

She seems to have yielded to His entreaties, and has gone with Him into the vineyard. While there He sees the necessity of guarding it against the ravages of the foxes, as the vines are in the condition to tempt those marauders. Foxes are said to love grapes, and the tender shoots and blossoms of the vines are very attractive to them, and in seeking for them they tear down the vines and trample them under their feet. As a careful master of His vineyard, He gives His servants charge to secure it against the foxes.

15. Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the
vineyards,
For our vineyards are in blossom.

Christ would have His Church beware of

those crafty and false teachers who creep into the Church that they may destroy the good seed that is springing up, and by their wily insinuations weaken the faith of the young converts, sap the roots of spiritual life, and take away the soul's nourishment. Thus they destroy the first developments of good. These blossoms of Christian graces are the most susceptible to injury, and easily destroyed when young and tender, and therefore should be more carefully guarded. That His Church may be able to rejoice in the full growth and perfection of the fruits of the vineyard, the buds must be watched and cultivated so as to develop into fruit; then will she continually increase in strength and power.

Filled with gratitude for the manifestations of His tender love, His affianced now rejoices in her binding relation to Him who is so able and ready to protect her. With exultation she says, —

16. My Beloved is mine, and I am His :
He feedeth *His flock* among the lilies.

She sees His infinite discernment in choosing the best food for increasing the vigor of His flock, while He leads them into these luxuriant pastures; and having tasted of His love, she longs for more of His presence. She prays Him to turn with the speed of the gazelle and bring her where He takes His flock, into these pastures, during the early morning, that she may take her fill of the sweetness of the lilies while the dew is on them.

17. Until the day break, and the shadows flee away,
Turn, my Beloved, and be Thou like a roe or a
young hart
Upon the mountains of Bether.

Daybreak is "day breathe" in the margin, and it is very significant. It is said that as the day is breaking upon Mount Lebanon, most refreshing breezes spring up, which are peculiarly grateful during the hot season, as the shadows of night flee away. The roe and the young hart, those agile and beautiful creatures, loved to feed among the lilies which grew in the valleys, and along the

sides of Mount Lebanon ; there they sought pasture until the scorching sun drove them up the mountain into the shadow of the woods for repose.

Thus the Church should constantly long for Christ's presence to be with her, and to breathe on her the Holy Spirit,¹ that she may be invigorated with strength for the work of life, until the time come when the heavens shall open, and reveal the brightness of the perfect morning. Then the shadows of earth shall flee away, and she will be called up higher to be ever with her Beloved.

In the following verse the affianced represents the Church when in a slumbering condition. Her Beloved withdraws, and she has grown "weary in well doing ;" but she begins to miss His loving companionship, and in her night visions she remembers the delightful intercourse they have had together ; how many tokens of love she has received from Him ; and she reflects how

¹ John xx. 22.

little she has done in return for all those blessings. She loved Him, but she had not shown her love by her works. "Faith apart from works is dead."¹ Repenting of her supineness she says :—

- iii. 1. By night on my bed I sought Him whom my
soul loveth :
I sought Him, but I found Him not.

¹ James ii. 26.

CHAPTER III.

SHE feels like David when he cried, "Hide not Thy face from me,"¹ and she determines to go in search of her Beloved, saying :

2. I will rise now, and go about the city,
In the streets and in the broad ways,

where are the poor and needy, whom she knows her Beloved serves ; and following in His footsteps, she continues, —

2. I will seek Him whom my soul loveth :
I sought Him, but I found Him not.

She follows on, "faint yet pursuing."

3. The watchmen that go about the city found me :
To whom I said, Saw ye Him whom my soul loveth ?

Having shown her zeal and sincerity in seeking her Beloved, and thus proving her love, when she cried to Him He was found

¹ Psalms cxliii. 7.

of her. What joy this finding of the Beloved brings!

4. It was but a little that I passed from them,
When I found Him whom my soul loveth:
I held Him, and would not let Him go,
Until I had brought him into my mother's house,
And into the chamber of her that conceived me.

There it was He had first wooed her, where He had called her after His own name, "as a lily among thorns," and where she had feasted with Him in the banqueting-house, and where when sick and fainting He had sustained and comforted her.

When the Church grows slack in duty, Christ takes His own way of bringing her back. He loves her, and draws her to run after Him, and when she invites Him to her home, He comes, and brings the joy of salvation with Him. He says, "For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee."¹

In this joy of first love restored, the affianced, with increased watchfulness lest any-

¹ Isaiah liv. 7.

thing disturb their harmony, renews her charge to the daughters:—

5. I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
By the roes, and by the hinds of the field,
That ye stir not up, nor awake my Love,
Until He please.

The desire of her heart is, that He would abide with her.

The Bridegroom has proved, in various ways and at different times, the love of His bride elect; He has found her faithful and true, and now He will claim her before the world, and by a public acknowledgment unite her to Himself by indissoluble ties. He has therefore gone to prepare for the nuptials, then to return and take her to His home, and the bride expectant watches for His approach.

The taking home of the bride was the principal part of the marriage ceremony, and the imagery here used is illustrative of the Oriental customs of the Jews.

A wedding was an occasion of great rejoicing among the friends and neighbors of

the bride and bridegroom, each one contributing something to the joys of the festival.

In the absence of her Bridegroom, the bride recalls the time of her betrothal when she rejoiced in the beauty of her Lord, and when her companions rejoiced with her. These sweet memories rise like incense before her, and while she is watching for His return, she sees Him in the distance approaching, and overjoyed cries out:—

6. Who is this that cometh up out of the wilderness
like pillars of smoke,
Perfumed with myrrh and frankincense,
With all the powders of the merchant?

It was customary for the bridegroom, when he came after his bride, to be thus redolent with perfumes.

That which she calls the "wilderness" may represent the darkness of midnight, when the Eastern marriages took place. "But at midnight there is a cry, Behold the Bridegroom! Come ye forth to meet Him."¹

¹ Matthew xxv. 6.

This call was made to the friends of the bride and bridegroom, who were watching to catch the procession, and join it in passing.

As we gather from various writers on those Eastern customs, the bridegroom goes forth to meet his bride ; the virgins, companions of the bride, accompany her from her father's house ; other virgins lead the procession, carrying silver pots of perfumes, and these are so liberally burned as to form columns of smoke rising like palm-trees in shape. Sometimes aromatics are burned in the windows of all the houses in the streets through which the procession is passing.

The maidens cheer the bride in leaving her father's house by describing to her the beauty of the home to which she is going, and the joys which await her there. In like manner the timid soul in leaving its earthly home for the untried realities of another world, finds encouragement and cheer in the Promises ; as it is written, " Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of

man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.”¹

The maidens direct the bride’s attention to the rich furnishing of the Bridegroom’s escort : —

7. Behold, it is the litter of Solomon ;
Threescore mighty men are about it,
Of the mighty men of Israel.

These probably represent the companions of the Bridegroom, “the sons of the bride-chamber.”²

Solomon in his kingly magnificence is here an illustrious type of a greater than Solomon, — of Christ, who is the Husband of His Church.

When He comes to take home His bride, He will come in His glory, with thousands of His saints, and His bride, who is waiting and watching for Him, will be well guarded, as Elisha was, when he prayed the Lord to open the eyes of his servant : “And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man ; and he saw, and, behold, the mountain was full of

¹ 1 Corinthians ii. 9.

² Matthew ix. 15.

horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." ¹

Christ's army is disciplined, valiant, and watchful, and, like the Bridegroom's escort,

8. They all handle the sword *and* are expert in war :
Every man hath his sword upon his thigh,
Because of fear in the night.

The evil one is always stalking abroad, seeking whom he may devour; under the cover of darkness he tries to hide his malignant deeds. The Church of Christ is his particular object of enmity; but while she watches and trusts, she need not fear, for with Christ is safety.

The car of state which was approaching with the Bridegroom to receive the bride, and to convey her to His palace, is more particularly described under the form of King Solomon's chariot :—

9. King Solomon made himself a palanquin
Of the wood of Lebanon.
10. He made the pillars thereof of silver,
The bottom thereof of gold, the seat of it of
purple,

¹ 2 Kings vi. 17.

The midst thereof being paved with love,
From the daughters of Jerusalem.

The ornamental work of Solomon's day was very rich in silver and gold, and in embroidery. Solomon's temple was supported by pillars of cedar, the wood of Lebanon, and overlaid with gold, as also were the beams, and the walls, and the doors, and the floor of the inner house. Also all the vessels that were for the house of God were made of gold; and the flowers, and the lamps, and the utensils around the altar were of pure gold, for so God had commanded Moses.¹

"Silver was nothing counted of in the days of Solomon." ²

"And the king made silver and gold to be in Jerusalem as stones." ³

The hangings of the temple were of blue and purple and crimson, and wrought with needlework by the women of Judea, who were famous in those days for their curious works in that line, — "And all the women that were

¹ Exodus xxv.

² Chronicles ix. 20.

³ Ibid. i. 15.

wise hearted did spin with their hands,"¹ — as were also the women of Sisera's day: —

To Sisera a spoil of divers colors,
A spoil of divers colors of embroidery,
Of divers colors of embroidery on both sides.²

She maketh for herself carpets of tapestry:
Her clothing is fine linen and purple.³

It was a custom of the women of the East to embroider — sometimes with gold wire — a covering, or mat, with love-mottoes, or with something interesting and appropriate to the occasion of the marriage, and to present it as a wedding-present to the bridegroom. In this instance the mat was inwrought with love-mottoes by the daughters of Jerusalem. The Bridegroom after graciously receiving it, and placing it in the midst of His car, thus paved the golden floor of His chariot with love for His bride.

It was a royal chariot, and even under His feet were the emblems of love. "God is love." These adornings by the women, whether at

¹ Exodus xxxv. 25.

² Judges v. 30.

³ Proverbs xxxi. 22.

work in the courts of God's house embroidering the curtains, or in their gifts of love for the chariot of the Bridegroom, show how the daughters of Zion in our day can help on the chariot of the Prince of Peace, by cheering the way with songs of praise and joy, and by works and gifts of love, and thus "adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour." ¹

The bride is adorned as David describes her : —

The King's daughter within *the palace* is all glorious :

Her clothing is inwrought with gold.

She shall be led unto the King in brodered work.

The virgins her companions that follow her

Shall be brought unto Thee.

With gladness and rejoicing shall they be led.

They shall enter into the King's palace. ²

When the bride is received by the Bridegroom, and seated by His side in His car of state, they enter Zion, the seat of the royal kingdom.

For the Lord hath chosen Zion ;

He hath desired it for His habitation.

¹ Titus ii. 9.

² Psalms xlv. 13-15.

This is my resting-place forever :

Here will I dwell ; for I have desired it.”¹

Bands of musicians always went in advance of the wedding procession, and singers cheered the way with songs in praise of the bride and bridegroom. When Israel rebelled against God, and as a consequence He forsook them, among other evils that came upon them it is said, “And their maidens had no marriage-song.”² At this wedding there is nothing lacking. The daughters of Zion are called upon to come and witness the glorious spectacle, and behold the Bridegroom whom Solomon represents : —

- II. Go forth, O ye daughters of Zion, and behold
 King Solomon,
 With the crown wherewith His mother hath
 crowned Him in the day of His espousals,
 And in the day of the gladness of His heart.

It was the crown of a King, and as such, no doubt, was made of gold and sparkling with jewels, — well worth coming out to see.

When Christ comes to receive His Bride,

¹ Psalms cxxxii. 13, 14.

² Psalms lxxviii. 63.

He will come as King, acknowledged by all peoples, and crowned by His Church as Lord of all.

With loving heart the Bridegroom turns to His bride, and points out the graces which adorn her, and which before had captivated Him :—

iv. 1. Behold, thou art fair, my love ; behold, thou art fair ;

Thine eyes are *as* doves behind thy veil.

CHAPTER IV.

HE first speaks of her gentle, loving eyes, which are looking only to Him for guidance :—

As the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her
mistress ;

So our eyes *look* unto the Lord our God.¹

In looking to Him she finds a pattern of excelling beauty. The more the Church whom the bride represents looks to the Bridegroom, the more she reflects His image. "But we all, with unveiled face reflecting as a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit."²

He next notes her veil of flowing hair which shades those gentle eyes,—

¹ Psalms cxxiii. 2.

² 2 Corinthians iii. 18.

1. Thy hair is as a flock of goats,
That lie along the side of Mount Gilead.

His comparison of her hair to a flock of goats on the side of Mount Gilead is supposed to refer to the hair of the beautiful Angora goat, which has long pendent ears, and soft glossy hair falling over its sides and reaching almost to the ground. The bride's long silken hair, in profusion covering her person as a veil, would seem to denote her modesty. Saint Paul says, "But if a woman have long hair, it is glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering."¹

The Bridegroom admires her outward beauty, because it symbolizes her grace within. It is not the grandeur of architectural display and ornament in His Church that Christ most commends; for He told His disciples, "These must all pass away,"² while the spiritual excellences of His Church are indestructible.

The Bridegroom next praises His bride's teeth:—

¹ 1 Corinthians xi. 15.

² Luke xxi. 5, 6.

2. Thy teeth are like a flock of ewes that are *newly* shorn,
 Which are come up from the washing ;
 Whereof every one hath twins,
 And none is bereaved among them.

He represents her teeth as uniform and perfect in shape, with none lacking, thus indicating youth and a good constitution. They are also like the ewes newly washed, showing cleanliness and purity. They are in good order as instruments adapted to prepare the food for digestion, that it may nourish the body.

Thus the ordinances of Christ's Church must be pure and uniform in their administration, that the provision of His house, the Bread of Life, which He has given may be duly received, and inwardly digested for the soul's nourishment.

3. Thy lips are like a thread of scarlet,
 And thy mouth is comely.

It is her speech, which is "with grace seasoned with salt,"¹ that makes her mouth so

¹ Colossians iv. 6.

comely. Her words, coming from a heart overflowing with love and wisdom, give expression to her mouth. "Grace is poured into thy lips."¹ It is said, "*For* the grace of his lips the king shall be his friend,"² and so it proved with her.

3. Thy temples are like a piece of a pomegranate
Behind thy veil.

His praises bring the blushes to her cheeks, rising to the temples. They are like the delicate pink inside the pomegranate, and seen through her veil of flowing hair they indicate her sensitive delicacy of soul.

Her neck, erect and firm, representing her conscious dignity, He compares in strength and beauty to David's tower:—

4. Thy neck is like the tower of David builded for an
armory,
Whereon there hang a thousand bucklers,
All the shields of the mighty men.

This tower to which He alludes was erected by David in Jerusalem, and was

¹ Psalms xlv. 2.

² Proverbs xxii. 11.

probably built of the same kind of pure white marble used in the temple. The shields were those captured by David's valiant soldiers when David went to fight Hadarezer, and "took the shields of gold that were on the servants of Hadarezer and brought them to Jerusalem."¹ They were probably hung on the tower where all could see them, as mementos of the prowess of his soldiers. We read of such a custom in the description of Tyre's beauty.

"They hanged their shields upon thy walls round about; they have perfected thy beauty."² "Shields of state were covered with beaten gold."³ Solomon made three hundred shields of beaten gold, and we find that some of the Egyptian necklaces were made of shield-shaped pieces of gold linked together. Such a chain upon the neck of His bride makes the allusion very beautiful.

In the New Testament the shield is made a symbol of faith. Paul tells the Church to

¹ 1 Chronicles xviii. 7.

² Ezekiel xxvii. 11.

³ 2 Chronicles ix. 16.

take the "shield of faith."¹ In the eleventh chapter of Hebrews we read of many worthies who used this shield, and were strong and mighty victors. These trophies of faith are held up to view, as were the shields of David's mighty men, that we might know their value and take the shield of faith for our protection. In the dress of Oriental women the neck is exposed very low, so that the breasts are partly visible; as these come under the Bridegroom's observation He says,

5. Thy two breasts are like two fawns that are twins
of a roe,
Which feed among the lilies.

Thus He is satisfied with the comeliness of His bride, and rejoices in the completeness of her charms, and He will take her with Him to Lebanon, that her beauty may be preserved by the health-giving odors of the mountain, when the fragrance exhaled by the morning dew is the richest, and when the breezes are the most refreshing. Therefore He says,

¹ Ephesians vi. 16.

6. Until the day break, and the shadows flee away,
I will get me to the mountain of myrrh,
And to the hill of frankincense.

Myrrh and frankincense were among the chief balsams that were burnt upon the altar at the morning and evening sacrifice. The incense arising from them represents the prayers and praises of Christ's Church which are offered upon the mountains of spiritual joy. Christ loves to receive them in their freshness, and in their exaltation; and when this incense ascends to Him the shadows of sin and the darkness of doubt and trial scatter as the mists before the rising sun.

The beauty of the bride comes with such fulness to the Bridegroom that He exclaims,

7. Thou art all fair, my love,
And there is no spot in thee.

The praising of the bride was customary at Oriental marriage festivals. The guests were always delighted with the bridegroom's expressions of love for her, and the friend of the bridegroom rejoiced in witnessing his satisfaction, — as John said to his disciples :

“The friend of the Bridegroom, which standeth and heareth Him, rejoiceth greatly because of the Bridegroom’s voice ; this my joy therefore is fulfilled.”¹

The bride must be fair indeed when He passes such an encomium upon her. Such will be the Church of Christ when perfected ; there will be no spot in her. “That He might present the Church to Himself a glorious *Church*, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing ; but that it should be holy and without blemish.”²

The marriage union between the Bridegroom and His bride being now consummated, the Bridegroom for the first time calls her His bride : —

8. Come with me from Lebanon, *my* bride,
With me from Lebanon :
Look from the top of Amana,
From the top of Senir and Hermon, —

that is, the highest peaks of the Syrian range. He shows her from all sides the beautiful land. As God showed Moses, from

¹ John iii. 29.

² Ephesians v. 27.

the top of Pisgah, the Canaan He had prepared for Israel, so Christ takes His Church up to "the munitions of rocks," where she "shall see the King in His beauty," and "behold a far stretching land."¹

It was the Delectable Mountains that Bunyan's Pilgrim, Christian, saw in the distance, "beautified with woods and vineyards, fruits and flowers, with springs and fountains; called Immanuel's land," and which can only be seen when on the mount with Christ.

The Bridegroom also takes His bride to look —

8. From the lions' dens,
From the mountains of the leopards.

There are no lions or leopards there now; they are driven away, or placed where they are powerless to harm her.

When the Church is on the mount with Christ she can look without fear into the dens of the wild beasts that sought to destroy her; for she sees that Christ has rescued her

¹ Isaiah xxxiii. 16, 17.

from great and strong enemies that were within her heart and enemies outside in the world, prowling about like roaring lions seeking to tear and to devour her. Her faith and trust in her deliverer is strengthened ; her heart glows with love and gratitude ; she knows that as He has saved her from dangers in the past, so He will continue His protecting care until He has brought her into the full fruition of perfect love and peace.

Words are inadequate to express the wonderful depth of Christ's love for His bride the Church. He has raised her up "to sit with Him in the heavenly places," that she may grow in strength like the cedars of Lebanon, and "that in the ages to come He might shew the exceeding riches of His grace."¹

When Christ has perfected His workmanship in His Church He will tell her, as the Bridegroom told His bride, —

9. Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, *my* bride ; calling her not only His bride, but His sister-bride, — Himself her Brother ; and as if to

¹ Ephesians ii. 6, 7.

make their union stronger, He cements it by a blood relationship between them, as children of one Father. For this reason it was that Christ took upon Him a human nature, calling Himself not only the Bridegroom of His Church, but also her elder Brother.

The Bridegroom repeats to His bride, —

9. Thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes; that one look revealed to Him her trusting heart; and He met it with His fervent love.

Christ waits with open arms to embrace His Church. The first glance toward Him, the first sincere desire for Him, He hastens to meet.

His Church is His peculiar treasure, as He told Moses to tell His people, "If ye will obey my voice indeed and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me from among all peoples."¹

Also the adorning of His bride has ravished His heart, He says, —

9. With one chain of thy neck.

¹ Exodus xix. 5.

David says,

He will beautify the meek with salvation.¹

Solomon in his Proverbs uses these adornings to illustrate a meek and obedient spirit :

For they shall be a chaplet of grace unto thy head,
And chains about thy neck.²

The love of the bride is a joy to the Bridegroom. He expresses it, —

10. How fair is thy love, my sister, *my* bride !

And to the Church, Christ says, “As the Bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee.”³

The love of the bride is not only beautiful to the Bridegroom, but is most refreshing to His spirit, as He says, —

10. How much better is thy love than wine !

And the smell of thine ointments than all manner
of spices !

Part of the bride's preparation for the marriage was her bath on the day previous, and

¹ Psalms cxlix. 4. ² Proverbs i. 9. ³ Isaiah lxii. 5.

her anointing with perfumed ointments. The perception by the Bridegroom of the odor of these delightful unguents, added to the richness and purity of her adornments, testified to Him that "His bride had made herself ready."¹

He had before praised her hair, flowing, as virgins wore it when attired for marriage. He had noticed her veil, the distinctive feature of her bridal dress, and the chains of gold and jewels, which no bride could forget.² This complete readiness of the bride proved to Him the sincerity of her love, and was more cheering to Him than wine, and more refreshing "than all manner of spices."

The anointing of the bride may figure the gifts and graces of the Spirit poured upon the Church; and when she gives out their fragrance, it is esteemed by Christ as better than all oblations.

He is more pleased with the love of His Church, than He would be with all the treas-

¹ Revelation xix. 7.

² Jeremiah ii. 32.

ures that could be offered to Him if love were wanting ; but when the gift is prompted by love it is "an odor of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God." ¹

In the Apocalypse John says of the bride, "And it was given unto her that she should array herself in fine linen, bright and pure ; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints." ²

In the third verse the Bridegroom praised the beauty of the bride's lips and mouth, and now He gives the reason of their comeliness,—

11. Thy lips, O *my* bride, drop as the honeycomb :
Honey and milk are under thy tongue.

In Syria children were fed with honey and milk or cream. The mixture of honey and cream was considered a great delicacy, and was commended for its healthfulness.

It was prophesied of Christ, "Butter and honey shall He eat that He may know to refuse the evil and choose the good." ³ Honey was used as an image of pleasure and happiness.

From the mouth of the bride flow the words

¹ Philippians iv. 18. ² Revelation xix. 8. ³ Isaiah vii. 15.

of heavenly wisdom and knowledge, which she had "laid up in her heart,"¹ and as David described those precepts of wisdom, "they were sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb."² They overflowed like the droppings of the full honeycomb. For "of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh,"³ and "my tongue also shall talk of Thy righteousness all the day long."⁴

When the Church comes fully to know "Christ, in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden,"⁵ then will her words exceed in sweetness the droppings of the honeycomb. "Then they that feared the Lord spake one with another: and the Lord hearkened and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before Him, for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name."⁶

The bride's wedding garment in those days was always white, a symbol of purity. When the bride anointed herself, after her bath,

¹ Psalms cxix. 11.² Ibid. xix. 10.³ Luke vi. 45.⁴ Psalms lxxi. 24.⁵ Colossians ii. 3.⁶ Malachi iii. 16.

she also highly perfumed her bridal dress. Her Bridegroom notes with pleasure the richness of its fragrance, and says, —

11. And the smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon.

To the Church, the wedding garment is the robe of righteousness with which Christ has clothed her. Her faith and works are the fragrance which comes up before Him “as the smell of Lebanon.”¹

Rev. I. L. Porter says, “The fresh mountain breezes on Lebanon are filled in early summer with the fragrance of the budding vine, and throughout the year with the rich odors of numerous aromatic shrubs.”²

Rev. Samuel Wolcott, D. D., writes, “The cedar cones exude a balsam which is very fragrant. The writer plucked several in the celebrated groves on Mt. Lebanon, and hung them in his apartment. For weeks after every one who entered his room noticed the delicate perfume which filled it.”

The Bridegroom, having called His bride by

¹ Isaiah lxi. 10.

² In Smith's Dictionary.

the name of every endearing charm of person, now likens her spiritual graces to a garden full of beautiful plants and trees that have been highly cultivated, —

12. A garden shut up is my sister, *my* bride ;
A spring shut up, a fountain sealed.

It is a garden which He esteems so valuable that He has fenced it in, as a protection from “the wild beasts of the field.”

It is set apart from the outside world, and His protection is about it as a hedge of defence. It has a well-spring of life within itself, sealed to all but those who know the gift of God that they may drink and never thirst.

In Isaiah this garden is called “a vineyard fenced,” and its products are called by Paul “the fruit of the Spirit.” The Bridegroom rejoices in its products :—

13. Thy shoots are an orchard of pomegranates, with
precious fruits ;
Henna with spikenard plants,
14. Spikenard and saffron,
Calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frank-
incense ;
Myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices, —

spices the choicest of their kind, such as were used in the service of the tabernacle, and for compounding the anointing oil.

In Christ's garden there is everything to make it beautiful for the eye, delicious for the taste, and fragrant for the smell. It is truly a paradise to all who will enter and partake of its precious fruits. And more than this, the Bridegroom says, —

15. *Thou art* a fountain of gardens.

Maundrell, in his "Early Travels in the East," when speaking of his visit to the palace garden of the Emir of Berytry, says, "The garden of the Emir's palace contains a large quadrangular plot of ground, divided into sixteen lesser squares, four in a row, with walks between them. Every one of these lesser squares was bordered with stone, and in the stone work were troughs, artificially contrived for conveying the water all over the garden, there being little outlets at every square, for the stream, as it passed by, to flow out and water them."

This was one form of irrigation in the East.

The one large garden by this arrangement became a plurality of gardens, which were all watered from the same fountain.

No garden there could afford to be without a reservoir of water of sufficient quantity for distribution through the various conduits, as a provision for the dry season of the year.

The Bridegroom compliments His bride as being the means of all this beauty and fruitfulness, as the "fountain of the gardens." His praise has great force when we consider the value of water in those Eastern lands.

Christ is the fountain-head of His garden. "Its watercourses are in His hand ; He turneth them whithersoever He will." ¹ His Church must make use of the means which He has abundantly provided for the nourishment of His garden, that it may produce "trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He might be glorified." ²

He also calls His bride —

15. A well of living waters,
And flowing streams from Lebanon ;

¹ Proverbs xxi. 1.

² Isaiah lxi. 3.

as Christ said to the Samaritan woman :
“The water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up unto eternal life.”¹

This living water Chrysostom calls “the grace of the Holy Spirit. For as the water which descends from heaven nourishes and vivifies, and though it may be of one kind operates in various ways, — is snow-white in the lily, but yellow in the narcissus, blushes in the rose, is purple in the violet, is sweet in the fig, but bitter in the wormwood, — so also the Divine Spirit which descends from heaven nourishes and vivifies the soul, and though of one kind exerts its power and efficacy in various ways.”

“There is a river the streams whereof make glad the city of God.”²

If the heart of the Church is open to receive this gift of the Holy Spirit, the stream will fill it to overflowing.

In answer to all the Bridegroom’s commendations of the bride, she invites Him into

¹ John iv. 14.

² Psalms xlv. 4.

the garden to eat of its fruits, and to enjoy its delightful odors.

She calls upon the winds to increase its fragrance:—

16. Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south;
Blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof
may flow out.

She calls upon the south wind, which is moist, to soften and open the pores of the spicy plants, and upon the north wind to blow on them, and waft their fragrance on the breeze. These plants have been watered from the well of living water.

The gifts and graces of the Church are watered by the Holy Spirit; without that living water they would wither and die. As in Christ they are “made alive,” therefore to Him belong all the fruits.¹ These graces must not be covered up, hid in a napkin, or stifled under a bushel, but they must flow out to His glory.

As these spices are wafted on the breeze, to the joy of all who breathe them, so the

¹ John xv. 5.

good works of the Church must be extended far and wide, that others seeing them "may glorify their Father who is in heaven."¹

The bride's petition is, —

16. Let my Beloved come into His garden,
And eat His precious fruits.

She would have Him come and grace the feast by His presence, and thus her faith and hope would be quickened, her love increased, and her courage and zeal strengthened.

He has accepted her invitation before she has given it.

¹ Matthew v. 16.

CHAPTER V.

v. 1. I am come into my garden, my sister, *my* bride.

CHRIST stands ready to visit His Church, and only waits for her to be willing to receive Him.

The garden is His. "My garden," He says ; He acknowledges the joint ownership, and partakes with her of its rich fruits, and adds, —

1. I have gathered my myrrh with my spice.

She had asked the winds to come and blow upon her garden, that it might give out its fragrance, and her Beloved has rejoiced in its odors.

Her love proffered the gift, and her heart offered the best of all the products of the garden to her Beloved. She withheld nothing.

As she herself belonged to Him, so she gave Him all she had.

He had previously praised her when He called her "a fountain of gardens," and He has now commended her work by accepting the products of the garden, and has gathered them as sweet incense offered to Himself.

He has also enlarged the feast by His rich gifts, —

1. I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey.

It is not pressed honey He has brought, strained out from the comb, but that which is the sweetest and is fresh with the comb.

Thus it is that the greater is the Church's love to Christ the fuller and the more abundant will be her offerings. She will give Him all she has, whether it is much or little, and if only a cup of cold water is given in His name, He will receive it as a peace offering laid upon the altar of thanksgiving. "For with such sacrifices God is well pleased."¹ It is "an odor of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God."²

¹ Hebrews xiii. 16.

² Philipians iv. 18.

Such gifts are the adornments of the Church's life, and are sparkling gems, which the world might envy.

In return for this love Christ will commune with His Church at His table, and will enrich the feast by His generous gifts of wine and milk. As the Bridegroom told His bride, —

1. I have drunk my wine with my milk.
 Eat, O friends ;
 Drink, yea, drink abundantly,
 O beloved.

This garden feast is an emblem of the feast of which Christ partakes with His beloved around the sacramental board.

He extends His invitation to every one that will come to the feast. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money ; come ye, buy, and eat ; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price."¹ David says, —

They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of
 Thy house ;
 And Thou shalt make them drink of the river of Thy
 pleasures.²

¹ Isaiah lv. 1.

² Psalms xxxvi. 8.

After the bride has partaken of this feast with the Bridegroom, and has been refreshed by His presence with her in the garden, we could hardly believe it possible for her to become slothful, or weary in well-doing ; but it seems that she has ; though she dislikes to own it, and excuses herself by saying, —

2. I was asleep, but my heart waked :
It is the voice of my Beloved that knocketh.

He was knocking at her heart ; He found that all right, or He would not have called her such endearing names as when He says, —

2. Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled.

But though He calls her by these tender names, that of bride is not among them, — though she is still His bride, — for she is not in unison with Him when He is toiling and she is sleeping.

He has been out in the darkness, where the shadows of night fall, and exposed to its chill damps, as He says, —

2. For my head is filled with dew,
My locks with the drops of the night.

She might at least have been watching for the Bridegroom's voice, when He had shown such love for her. Now He entreats, —

3. I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on?
I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them? —

as He will if He goes away over the dirt. He is ready for entrance, His sandals removed, as was the custom when entering a house. She hears the call, but her lethargy still overpowers her, and she does not arouse until she sees His hand.

4. My Beloved put in His hand by the hole *of the door,*
And my heart was moved for Him.

His hand is upon the bolt, that hand of blessing; but He cannot open without her aid. The pin that holds the bolt must be withdrawn from the inside.

Her Bridegroom is waiting to be gracious, and will enter when the door is open to receive Him.

Christ's Church should not be slothful, but should be always ready, "with loins girded about, and lamps burning, and like unto men looking for their Lord, when He shall return from the marriage feast, that when He cometh and knocketh, they may straight-way open unto Him."¹

The bride, now thoroughly aroused, says,

5. I rose up to open to my Beloved.

She takes hold of the lock and finds the traces of His touch in the healing balsams, and in the sweet-smelling spices upon the handles; and in such abundance were they she says, —

5. And my hands dropped with myrrh,
And my fingers with liquid myrrh,
Upon the handles of the bolt.

Christ's loving, generous hands drop healing balsam wherever they touch. The sin-stricken ones feel the power of His forgiving love coursing through their veins, and giving them new life and vigor. The wanderer breathes

¹ Luke xii. 36.

the odor of the Balm of Gilead and is drawn to follow after Him. Even poor doubting Thomas, when he saw those hands the nails had cleft, from which the Balm of Gilead poured forth, could not but exclaim, "My Lord and my God!"

The bride, humbled and grieved at the thought of her indolence, and melted by the sight of these rich tokens of His love which He has left behind Him, says, —

6. I opened to my Beloved ;
But my Beloved had withdrawn
Himself, *and* was gone.

She is "too late." He had left in sorrow. She hears His retreating step, and His far-off voice, and says, —

6. My soul had failed me when He spake :
I sought Him, but I could not find Him ;
I called Him, but He gave me no answer.

He knew when her heart had failed her, and He gave her strength to arouse from her sleep, but He hid Himself that He might prove her. If He had left her to herself,

she would have turned upon her bed and said, —

*Yet a little sleep, a little slumber,
A little folding of the hands to sleep.*¹

She might have received Him with comfort and joy if she had been watchful and ready ; but now she is rebuked for her short-coming, and has to go out into the chill night air to seek Him. When the Church does not follow Christ, she has to bear her burden of darkness and exposure alone.

How pitiful the bride's plaint : —

7. The watchmen that go about the city found me,
They smote me, they wounded me ;
The keepers of the walls took away my mantle
from me.

The watchmen on the walls of Zion, God's ministers, are sometimes lacking in charity toward the wanderer. Her Bridegroom is not at her side to defend her, and alone, and out in the night with darkness around her, she is taken for a vain woman, and is exposed to contempt. She needs the light of His counte-

¹ Proverbs xxiv. 33.

nance to shine upon her, that His image may be reflected from her face, and thus reveal to others the knowledge that she is His.

When Christ's Church becomes cold and lax in duty, Christ will hide His face from her, darkness will gather around her, and her only hope is in seeking again the "Sun of Righteousness," the Fountain of light and warmth, and then, whether in prosperity or in adversity, when found, "He will be to her an everlasting light, and Christ will be her glory."¹

The absence of the Bridegroom caused the bride to feel her own weakness, and deepened her repentance. In her grief she is almost beside herself ; she begs her friends, her companions, the virgins, to help her in her search for Him, and to intercede for her : —

8. I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if ye find my Beloved,

That ye tell Him, that I am sick of love.

When the bride was overpowered with love, and fainting, then her Beloved upheld her

¹ Isaiah lx. 19.

(ii. 6), and she knows that if she can again find Him, His arms will be around her, for her support and comfort. In reply to her petition these daughters ask, —

9. What is thy Beloved more than *another* beloved,
O thou fairest among women?

Wherein does He excel any other? They try to comfort her by praising her beauty, as though it were strange that He could leave one so full of charms. Perhaps her earnest desire after the Bridegroom has heightened her beauty, and caused them to wonder at her distress. They think that He must be transcendent in beauty and worth, if He is superior to her.

There are many worldlings who endeavor to make the seekers after God to rest satisfied with themselves, and to believe that they will be saved, as they have always been upright and amiable, and that because God is merciful they need not seek after Him.

But the bride does not feel that satisfaction with herself; she knows how little she deserves the praises of the daughters, and in her

humility she cannot answer them; therefore they repeat the question, —

9. What is thy Beloved more than *another* beloved
That thou dost so adjure us ?

In the fulness of her love, she replies by describing Him as the perfection of beauty and grace in person and character. As David expressed it, "Thou art fairer than the children of men."¹

10. My Beloved is white and ruddy,
The chiefest among ten thousand.

He is full of health and vigor. He is the standard-bearer. Other kings and priests and prophets may be great in excellence, but none can equal Him. He is the banner chief. Alluding to His kingly crown, she says, —

11. His head is *as* the most fine gold.

As in the day of her espousals she had called on the daughters of Zion to behold her King with His bridal crown, so now by His crown He may be recognized.

Describing His person more particularly, she begins with His head, —

¹ Psalms xlv. 2.

11. His locks are bushy, *and* black as a raven, —
thus showing the strength of manhood ; no
baldness, no gray hair, no sign of the weak-
ness of age upon Him.

12. His eyes are like doves beside the water brooks ;
Washed with milk *and* fitly set, —

like the eyes of young doves, clear and with
fulness of form and vision.

Roberts says there is an orientalism which
expresses complete satisfaction and unstinted
joy, — “ Oh, they are a happy pair, they wash
themselves with milk.”

13. His cheeks are as a bed of spices, *as* banks of
sweet herbs.

They are rounded and full, healthful in color,
and fragrant with aroma.

13. His lips are *as* lilies, dropping liquid myrrh, —
as the red lilies found in the East, the Am-
aryllis-lutea, and they are speaking words of
purity and health to the soul. “ Grace is
poured into thy lips.” ¹

¹ Psalms xlv. 2.

“ And all bare Him witness, and wondered at the words of grace which proceeded out of His mouth.”¹ David says, —

How sweet are Thy words unto my taste !
Yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth !²

14. His hands are *as* rings of gold set with beryl.

As golden rings encircle the fingers, so His hands are the rings or orbs (it is “ cylinders ” in the margin) encircling gifts, golden and precious, ready for distribution to the needy. The color of the beryl-stone is the same color as that upon the wheels and the work mentioned in Ezekiel’s vision³ of the four wheels which represent the dispensations of God’s providence.

The beryl is the color of the sea, reflecting heavenly beauty, and when the sun shines upon it, has a refulgence like gold. Thus His hands reflect their shining work.

14. His body is *as* ivory work overlaid *with* sapphires.

As ivory is firm, polished, and enduring, and the work is ornamented with sapphires,

¹ Luke iv. 22. ² Psalms cxix. 103. ³ Ezekiel i. 16.

the color of the blue heavens, — an emblem of love, — so is His compassionate love bright and enduring.

15. His legs are *as* pillars of marble, set upon sockets of fine gold.

They are firm and strong, supporting all the body, and able and ready to do service for His bride.

15. His aspect is like Lebanon, excellent as the cedars.

His whole bearing is majestic, like the snow-capped Lebanon, the centre of the Syrian range of mountains, and overtopping them all ; and excellent as those erect, towering, and evergreen cedars on its sides, which are firmly rooted, resisting the storms, and are objects of grandeur and beauty. As such they are used to denote kings and potentates of the highest rank. Their wood is incorruptible. They are called "trees of the Lord." ¹

It is promised that the righteous "shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon." ²

¹ Psalms civ. 16.

² Ibid. xcii. 12.

The bride could not find any nobler objects in nature with which to compare Him.

16. His mouth is most sweet.

The mouth is the most expressive feature of the face, and the character of the individual is generally stamped upon it. To the bride His mouth expressed sweetness of manner and disposition and every noble quality, and through it came words of wisdom and comfort.

How sweet are Thy words unto my taste !
Yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth ! ¹

It is therefore natural that she should again refer to that feature in closing her description of His person.

She ends by saying,

16. Yea, He is altogether lovely.
This is my Beloved, and this is my Friend,
O daughters of Jerusalem.

Can you wonder at my transports of love toward so glorious a person, especially when He has shown Himself my Friend ?

¹ Psalms cxix. 103.

Calling her Beloved her Friend she testifies to her faith in Him.

Many persons may have love for each other without esteem, or may esteem each other without love, but friendship requires both love and esteem. Two persons claiming the title for each other of "my friend," must have some sentiment and aim in common. When the bride calls her Beloved "my Friend," she does not mean to affirm that being her Friend, He is any the less her Beloved ; but she gives another reason why she is held to Him, and that is, their mutual esteem.

As love begets love, His love to her has drawn her to Him ; she feels her dependence on Him, and He delights to support and bless her.

As God called Abraham His friend, so Christ calls His Church His friend.

As the bride rejoices in the perfections of the Bridegroom, so will the Church of Christ look upon His perfections with admiration and praise, and she will rejoice in proclaim-

ing to the world His majesty and beauty, — not only by words, but also by deeds. She will seek to be like her Beloved, following in His footsteps; and the closer she follows Him the more she will be like Him; and the more she is like Him, the closer will she be joined to Him.

CHAPTER VI.

IN the first part of the bride's intercourse with the daughters of Jerusalem they asked, What is thy Beloved more than another beloved? but her glowing description of His beauty and excellency makes them also eager to find Him, and they ask now, —

1. Whither is thy Beloved gone,
O thou fairest among women?
Whither hath thy Beloved turned Him,
That we may seek Him with thee?

When the Church proclaims Christ's beauty and talks —

Of the glorious majesty of His honor,
And of His wondrous works,¹

then will others also be led to desire Him.

The bride now recalls where it was she had last seen her Bridegroom. She remem-

¹ Psalms cxlv. 5.

bers the rich feast with Him in His garden, and knows it was there He loved to be, and she answers to the earnest inquiry of the daughters, —

2. My Beloved is gone down to His garden, to the
beds of spices,
To feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies.

These spices in the garden are supposed to denote the prayers and praises of Christ's Church, which are as acceptable an offering to Him as the odors of the spices are to the Bridegroom. "He gathers them in golden vials, and with heaven's incense from His golden censer, He offers them upon the golden altar before the throne."¹

It was the fragrance arising from the beds of spices which drew the Bridegroom into His garden. There is where the bride should have waited for Him, and cultivated the spices and the lilies, until He bade her go to rest. There it is where she now seeks and finds Him ; and with rapture she exclaims, —

¹ Revelation v. 8 ; viii. 3.

3. I am my Beloved's and my Beloved is mine.
He feedeth *His flock* among the lilies.

She rejoices in belonging to Him; and knows that He cares for her and is indeed her Friend.

Christ feeds His Church as a shepherd feeds his flock with rich pastures. It is not mean food that He gives her; but beautiful, fragrant lilies, heavenly food, that she may grow in beauty.

As the bride is now in the way of duty, drawing others to Him, and comes to Him with penitence, His arms are open to receive her, and thus lighted by His smile she is charming in His eyes; as "when the sun arises with healing in His wings,"¹ the languishing, drooping flowers revive. He remembers His marriage covenant with her, and praises her beauty, which "was perfect through His majesty which He had put upon her."²

4. Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah.

The word "Tirzah" means pleasant. Tirzah was a beautiful town in Ephraim, and situated

¹ Malachi iv. 2.

² Ezekiel xvi. 14.

in juxtaposition to Jerusalem. In the days of Jeroboam it was the seat of the royal residence.

Roberts says, "In the East handsome women are often compared to their sacred cities."

But the climax of the Bridegroom's comparisons is, —

4. Comely as Jerusalem,

which is, as David expresses it, —

Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth,
Is mount Zion, on the sides of the north,
The city of the great King.¹

Especially was Jerusalem comely in the magnificence and symmetrical proportions of its temple, situated on the north side of Mount Zion, and which was a type of Christ's Church universal.

He also likens her beauty and majesty to a bannered host, —

4. Terrible as an army with banners,

¹ Psalms xlviii. 2.

which excites reverence and awe by its invincible array.

He declares her conquest of Him when He says,

5. Turn away thine eyes from me,
For they have overcome me.

Then continuing, He recounts the same power which had first captivated Him ; thus giving her a double assurance of His love :—

5. Thy hair is as a flock of goats,
That lie along the side of Gilead.
6. Thy teeth are like a flock of ewes,
Which are come up from the washing ;
Whereof every one hath twins,
And none is bereaved among them.
7. Thy temples are like a piece of a pomegranate
Behind thy veil.

The beauty of holiness is the adornment of Christ's Church. When she is walking in love, and her inward life is in unison with Christ, her outward appearance will show the characteristics within.

In the eyes of the Bridegroom His chosen has no equal. He tells her, —

8. There are threescore queens, and fourscore concubines,
And virgins without number, —

perhaps alluding to the daughters of Jerusalem who have accompanied the bride in her search for the Bridegroom; or He may refer to other kings who have queens and concubines many; but none of them can compare with her; to Him there is but one spouse: —

9. My dove, my undefiled, is *but* one;
She is the only one of her mother;
She is the choice one of her that bare her.

The dove to which He compares her is celebrated for its conjugal fidelity; it pairs for life, and is a symbol of purity.

As the bride was but one to the Bridegroom, so must the Bridegroom be all in all to His bride.

“There are gods many, and lords many; yet to the Church there is one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we through Him.”¹

¹ 1 Corinthians viii. 6.

“Christ is the centre of the Church’s unity,” as Paul says, to sum up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens, and the things upon the earth.¹ Thus all are bound in Him.

9. The daughters saw her, and called her blessed ;
Yea, the queens and the concubines, and they
praised her.

They saw her charms when they called her the “fairest among women;” and now they witness the great love and esteem in which her Bridegroom holds her, and their admiration breaks forth in praises.

When the Church is clothed in the beauty of holiness, and Christ Himself commends her, nominal Christians will seek her influence, and even the world will acknowledge her excellences, though some may envy and persecute her.

The Bridegroom continues His commendations. He has again received her to His arms, and she is more precious to Him than ever.

¹ Ephesians i. 10.

10. Who is she that looketh forth as the morning,
Fair as the moon,
Clear as the sun, —

like the moon, with so mild, gentle and soft a radiance. As it reflects the light of the sun, so she reflects the majesty He has put upon her, and thus typifies the Church reflecting the glory of the Sun of Righteousness.

“The Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light ; and thy God thy glory.”¹

The effulgence of the Sun of Righteousness shines with such lustre as to penetrate to the inmost recesses of the sinner’s heart, and reveal the hideousness of sin within. Therefore when the Church comes at last, with flying banners, her Bridegroom leading her on to victory over His and her enemies, she will be to them —

10. Terrible as an army with banners.

The Bridegroom was watching the development of His garden, that it might produce fruit in perfection, and that no weeds should

¹ Isaiah xvi. 19.

be allowed to grow there ; and He thus explains His absence, —

11. I went down into the garden of nuts,
To see the green plants of the valley.

These garden nuts were usually planted in a valley with pools of water near, for irrigation, and a writer says, “ There are still places in Syria bearing the name of ‘ nut vale,’ ‘ fig vale,’ ” etc.

It is probable that this division of the garden was the nursery, where were the seedlings and shoots of the nut-trees, consisting of olives, walnuts, and almonds, besides fig-trees, quince, and pomegranate, orange, lemon, and mulberry, with rare and precious plants, many of which were exotics.

All through the poem we read of their gardens of spices and fruits and flowers. The garden of nuts represents a garden on a large scale with extensive cultivation. It was the garden of a King.

Christ’s Church is sometimes called His garden ; there are many divisions in it and many rare plants and exotics. It is fragrant

and beautiful, and yields precious fruits, under His superintendence.

He also wished —

11. To see whether the vine budded,
And the pomegranates were in flower.

The Bridegroom had compared the modest blushes of His bride to a "piece of a pomegranate behind her veil" (iv. 3), and He delights to see this beautiful fruit in flower, as He does to know that the germ of her modesty is blossoming.

Christ notes the early development of the graces in His Church, and examines His garden to see if its flowers are blooming and forming into fruit. He also watches over His vine from its first buddings, that the young shoots may grow into branches, and bear much fruit.¹

When He heard her voice calling (in the third verse), "I am my Beloved's and my Beloved is mine," He tells her that He was so moved by her lamentation after Him —

¹ John xv.

12. Or ever I was aware, my soul set me
Among the chariots of my princely people.

In the margin it is, "made me like the chariots of Ammi-nadib," and I was speeding to embrace my love.

In Chronicles¹ we find Amminadab, the chief of the house of Uzziel, a prince and a Levite whom David selected, among others, to bring up the ark. There was great joy and shouting on the occasion, and it is probable that Amminadab may have been celebrated as driving swift chariots, which he willingly used (as his name indicated a man of generosity) to carry up his brethren, the Levites, who were appointed to go to the house of Obededom the Gittite, and from there carry the ark upon their shoulders to the city of David.

The expression "made me like the chariots of Ammi-nadib," may have become a proverb to represent earnestness and alacrity in the pursuit of any desirable object. Thus, when the Church of Christ is seeking to return from her wanderings and is calling after Him, He

¹ 1 Chronicles xv. 10, 12.

is always ready to answer her call, and will hasten to meet her.

He says, "For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee."¹

She had heard the Bridegroom's voice calling her and entreating, —

13. Return, return, O Shulamite;
Return, return, that we may look upon thee.

He was drawing her with loving cords, calling her "Shulamite," which means *peaceable*, *perfect*.

She is perfect with His imputed righteousness, perfect in her union with Him, and will be faultless when she is fully clothed, and He takes her to be with Him forever.

Some writers think He calls her the Shulamite, from "Salem," which is Jerusalem, the birth-place of the Church. "Salem" also means *peace*, or *perfect*.

Heaven, the new Jerusalem, is the Salem of the Church triumphant.

¹ Isaiah liv. 7.

In Salem also is His tabernacle,
And His dwelling-place in Zion.¹
Yea, of Zion it shall be said, This one and that one
was born in her,
And the Most High Himself shall establish her.²

Feeling her unworthiness, she asks, —

13. What will ye see in the Shulamite?

He answers : —

13. As it were the company of two armies, —
that is, the hosts of God, which are for the
advance and the defence of the truth.

The Church of Christ comprises the whole
army of believers, both Jews and Gentiles,
for all shall be brought in. “Two armies”
in the margin is called “Mahanaim,” the name
Jacob gave to the place where hosts of angels
met him on his journey to Canaan.³

The Bridegroom had twice before said His
bride was “terrible as an army with banners,”
and now He calls her a double host. She is
a tower of strength supported by Divine
love. “His banner over her was love;” but

¹ Psalms lxxvi. 2.

² Ibid. lxxxvii. 5.

³ Genesis xxxii. 1, 2.

He will be "a very flame of the Lord" to His and her enemies.

The Bridegroom describes more fully in the next chapter what is to be seen in the Shulamite, His bride, by giving a completer portrait of her, as perfect in all her members.

CHAPTER VII.

HE begins His encomium this time with the feet, for they had brought her in search of Him : —

vii. 1. How beautiful are thy feet in sandals, O
prince's daughter!
The joints of thy thighs are like jewels,
The work of the hands of a cunning workman.

God, the great King, calls the members of His Church His children, and in the forty-fifth Psalm the bride is spoken of as the King's daughter. In this Song the Bridegroom frequently designates her as "my sister-bride." She is thus recognized as the daughter of a king, a princess, and in rank fit to be His spouse.

Her feet are beautiful in sandals, thus signifying that she is ready for walks of usefulness. In the East the sandals are

removed when entering a house ; here they are represented as on the feet. Paul says : "And having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace." ¹

Her limbs are perfectly adapted to carry on the beautiful work which the feet start out to perform. They are "girded with truth." Christ is the workman, "from whom all the body fitly framed and knit together through that which every joint supplieth, according to the working in due measure of each several part, maketh the increase of the body unto the building up of itself in love." ²

The image in the third verse has been given before, showing that the Church is capable of nourishing her children, that is, the young converts, or inexperienced. It has milk for babes.

The similitude in this second verse is now added, to signify the full nourishment afforded to the whole body of the Church,—

2. Thy navel is *like* a round goblet,
Wherein no mingled wine is wanting.

¹ Ephesians vi. 15.

² Ibid. iv. 16.

It is in that healthy condition that it needs nothing more to strengthen it.

It is said in Proverbs, third chapter, —

Fear the Lord and depart from evil ;
It shall be health to thy navel, —

that is, to thy whole body.

2. Thy belly is *like* an heap of wheat
Set about with lilies.

That part from which the rest of the body is nourished is healthful and vigorous in its vitality and ability to perform its functions. It is like the heap of selected wheat in the storehouse, that is adorned with flowers as a sign of its superior quality.

3. Thy two breasts are like two fawns
That are twins of a roe.
4. Thy neck is like the tower of ivory.

He had before likened her neck to David's tower of marble, signifying strength and dignity ; but now He compares it to ivory, which has a beauty and lustre of its own, and by its fineness of grain and firmness of

texture is capable of receiving the highest polish ; so also has the Church of Christ an intrinsic beauty, and by her cultivation of every virtue she can be made to grow into the brightest form of spiritual life.

The Bridegroom now eulogizes her head, the crown of all this beauty, which this tower of ivory supports. He begins with her eyes, the windows of the soul, —

4. Thine eyes *as* the pools in Heshbon, by the gate of Bath-rabbim.

These pools probably were celebrated for their clearness and beauty. Such eyes were not morbid, but were clear, joyous, and trusting ; and in them the Bridegroom saw His own image reflected.

4. Thy nose is like the tower of Lebanon
Which looketh toward Damascus.

A prominent nose was considered by the Hebrews as representing intelligence and force of character.

The comparison to the tower of Lebanon may allude to some watchtower that Solomon

had erected on Mount Lebanon, both beautiful and commanding in its prominence.

Or the comparison may be drawn from the view presented of Mount Hermon, which is Lebanon's most conspicuous peak. It is the most beautiful mountain in Syria or Palestine, and is covered with perpetual snow, which is of such great depth and smoothness as to give it a velvety appearance. For that reason it is called "the White Mountain."

From Smith's Dictionary we learn that Hermon had various names given to it by different peoples, each descriptive of some striking feature, as "the Elevated," "the Chief Mountain," "the Snowy Mountain." The Sidonians called it "Sirion," from a word meaning *to glitter*, and the Amorites "She-nir," from a word meaning *to clatter*,¹ — both words signifying *breastplate*, suggested by the reflection of the sun's rays when shining upon its rounded top.

It is said that from whatever part of Palestine the eye is turned northward, Hermon

¹ Deuteronomy iii. 9.

terminates the view. It must have presented a strong contrast to the dark green foliage which covered the sides of the lower and intermediate bluffs. Perhaps the poet David drew his picture of "white as snow in Salmon,"¹ from the point of view in which he saw Hermon.

The Bridegroom now sums up the description of the whole head, and says, —

5. Thine head upon thee is like Carmel.

Carmel is a lofty, majestic promontory in central Palestine, over one thousand seven hundred feet in height, running out to the Mediterranean Sea. It is shaped like a flattened cone. It is described by different writers in Smith's Dictionary as clothed with verdure, and covered, in some parts, with impenetrable brushwood of oak and other evergreens, and in other parts, "bright with various kinds of flowers." "Still the fragrant lovely mountain that he was of old." "The whole mountain-side was dressed with blos-

¹ Psalms lxxiii. 14.

soms, and flowering shrubs, and fragrant herbs." "All these flowers wafted their fragrance in volumes through the air." "It was the garden of Eden run wild."

Solomon could not find anything in nature more beautiful, with which to compare the head of the spouse of Christ, than this fruitful hill.

The prophet Isaiah likens the prosperity of Christ's kingdom to "the excellency of Carmel."¹ "Thou shalt also be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God."²

The Bridegroom adds, —

5. And the hair of thine head like purple, —
that is, a beautiful shade of purplish black. In the margin it is "like the purple of a king," emblematic of royalty. "It was a very expensive color, obtained from the murex shell-fish, and found in the Mediterranean Sea. It is said that only a single drop is found, in a small vessel, in the throat of each fish."³

¹ Isaiah xxxv. 2.

² Ibid. lxii. 3.

³ Smith's Dictionary.

By this purple crowning beauty He represented her union with the royal Bridegroom. And thus —

5. The King is held captive in the tresses *thereof*.

All these perfections with which the King has adorned His chosen bride fit her with such becoming grace, as to bind Him to her. As the Bridegroom approves her and exclaims, —

6. How fair and how pleasant art thou,
O love, for delights ! —

so Christ delights in His Church as she walks with Him. He delights in the consolations which she gives to the weak and fainting. He delights in her conscious dignity which enables her to hold her head erect while her eyes are ever looking to Him. All her outward beauties are delights to Him, because they are the manifestation of her inward character. The more the Church cultivates these characteristics, the more acceptable she is to the Bridegroom.

Having commended the various points of

beauty in His bride, He now takes in her full proportions.

7. This thy stature is like to a palm-tree,
And thy breasts to clusters.

Like the palm-tree, she is upright and constant, not deviating from the right course. The palm-tree grows straight up toward heaven. It is said of it that the elasticity of its fibre is such that it asserts its uprightness even when loaded with weights. Oppression and persecution have always advanced the growth of the Church heavenward. The taller the palm-tree grows, the more expansive are its branches, and the greener is its foliage. The nearer to heaven the Church lives, the richer and brighter is its life. The spreading branches of the palm are used as emblems of the Church's victory over the flesh and over sin. We read of "a great multitude which no man could number standing before the throne and before the Lamb, arrayed in white robes, and palms in their hands,"¹ as the symbols of their final victory.

¹ Revelation vii. 9.

The fruit of the palm, growing in clusters high up beneath its spreading branches, represents the virtues of the Church, which, like those shadowed clusters protected from the scorching sun, are shielded from the injury of fiery persecution, and grow in the light and warmth of heaven. Like those clusters, her virtues are conspicuous, beautiful, and life-giving, that those who are born of the Church may always find their nourishment in it. Roberts quotes a saying in the East, "The wicked spring like grass, but good men endure like the palm-tree, and bear much fruit."

8. I said, I will climb up into the palm-tree,
I will take hold of the branches thereof.

He would thus declare Himself her standard-bearer and defender, and proclaim His final victory over the kingdoms of the world.

8. Let thy breasts be as clusters of the vine.

The vine yields more abundant and refreshing fruit than the palm-tree.

8. And the smell of thy breath like apples.

The fragrance of her breath, which is her words of wisdom and affection, let them be as a sweet savor, and as acceptable as when Noah offered his offering unto the Lord, "and the Lord smelled the sweet savor."¹

9. And thy mouth like the best wine,
That goeth down sweetly for my beloved,
Causing the lips of those that are asleep to speak.

The mouth is but the echo of the heart. Christ says, "The good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good ; and the evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth that which is evil : for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh."² He would have her mouth always refreshing to herself and to others, by giving from her heart loving expressions of comfort and cheer ; for "a merry heart is a good medicine,"³ and has a reflex influence both on the one that gives the

¹ Genesis viii. 21.

² Luke vi. 45.

³ Proverbs xvii. 22.

cheer, and on the one that receives it. "He that is of a cheerful heart hath a continual feast,"¹ and it is like the best wine that is given to the sick or aged, and such as would restore the fainting and "bitter in soul."² "The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious."³ Such is the wisdom Christ would wish His Church to have, and all her words of love and cheer are written in His book of remembrance.

His commendations of her have drawn her closely to Him, and in the joy of her union with Him she again exclaims with rapture, —

10. I am my Beloved's,
And His desire is toward me.

This joy is increased by the fact that not only is she His, but also that His desire is toward her. Thus the Church is assured of the love Christ bears to her, and with exultation she can say, "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He hath clothed me with the garments

¹ Proverbs xv. 15.

² Ibid. xxxi. 6.

³ Ecclesiastes x. 12.

of salvation, He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with a garland, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels." ¹

The bride invites Him to go with her in her work:—

II. Come, my Beloved, let us go forth into the field ;
Let us lodge in the villages.

These villages were probably the huts or temporary residences in the fields outside of the city, where the laborers lived during the vintage. The bride wished to make amends for her former indolence by increased zeal in her work, which she knew would be successful with her Bridegroom's presence to animate and guide her. She would enter with Him into the humble dwellings of the poor, and lodge among the laborers, and by their presence and counsel encourage and cheer them, and in this way turn their huts into homes of joy. She would be prompt in business, too, setting an example to the underworkers to rise betimes:—

¹ Isaiah lxi. 10.

12. Let us get up early to the vineyards ;
 Let us see whether the vine hath budded, *and*
 its blossoms be open,
And the pomegranates be in flower :
 There will I give Thee my love.

Thereby she would show her interest in the work, and manifest her love to Him. She also knows that if her Bridegroom is with her, every burden will be made lighter, and the toil sweeter.

When the Church is diligent in business, and fervent in spirit, working with Christ, the buds will develop and grow into blossoms, and the blossoms into fruit ; and while she is watchful, the foxes cannot enter to destroy the vines.

The bride shows her earnestness in urging Him to go with her by a reminder that the spring is far advanced. Thus Christ would have His Church bring forth her strong reasons, that He may prove her zeal for Him, and her desire for His presence.

The bride says, —

13. The mandrakes give forth fragrance, —

showing that they are ripened and fit to eat. The fruit is gathered about the time of wheat harvest, which, in that land, is in May. By some scholars the mandrakes are supposed to be what the Arabs call "love plants." It is said that they are very strongly scented when ripe ; but to most Europeans the odor is not agreeable.

As another inducement for Him to accompany her, she tells Him, —

13. And at our doors are all manner of precious
fruits, new and old,
Which I have laid up for Thee, O my Beloved.

Like a good wife who seeks the interest of her husband, she is not satisfied with the work that she has done in the past ; but she is still busy getting stores for Him.

When Christ's Church thus works for Him, not resting upon past good deeds, but is pressing forward to fill up the measure of that which is required of her, then He will be with her and bless her according to His promise : —

“Bring ye the whole tithe into the storehouse, . . . and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough *to receive it.*”¹

¹ Malachi iii. 10.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE bride commences her address here by expressing, in still stronger terms than any she has heretofore used, her ardent love, and desire for a greater intimacy with and nearness to her Bridegroom :—

viii. 1. Oh that Thou wert as my brother,
That sucked the breasts of my mother !
When I should find Thee without, I would
kiss Thee ;
Yea, and none would despise me.

She wishes that, in addition to their marriage bond, He might be as a brother to her. A brother would cover his sister's defects ; for any fault in the sister would reflect on the household.

If the bride were held as if she were of the same royal stock as the Bridegroom, she would be honorably esteemed. As a sister,

one of the same family, she would resemble her brother, and in a measure partake of the same natural tendencies. The world would recognize the likeness, and she could with more freedom express her sisterly love.

The Bridegroom has already owned this endearing relation, and called her His "sister-bride."

God is the Father of His Church, whom "He also foreordained *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren."¹

"For both He that sanctifieth and they that are sanctified are all of one: for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren."²

She longs to be more and more like her Bridegroom, as one brought up in the same house and filled with the same spirit.

She says, —

2. I would lead Thee, *and* bring Thee into my
 mother's house,
 Who would instruct me.

That is, her mother would teach her how

¹ Romans viii. 29.

² Hebrews ii. 11.

she could best serve Him. This seems to be her chief desire and aim. She adds, —

2. I would cause Thee to drink of spiced wine,
Of the juice of my pomegranate.

This spiced wine, made fragrant with aromatics, is still considered a great delicacy in the East. It is supposed by some that, although fermented, it is a weak wine, and is not intoxicating. The bride would give it to her Bridegroom, for she would give Him her choicest gifts.

In return she would have the inspiration of His wisdom to guide her. Their communion would be sweet, her confidence in Him would be strengthened, and her faith and assurance complete when, she says, —

3. His left hand *should be* under my head,
And his right hand should embrace me.

David experiences this when he says, "Thy right hand upholdeth me."¹ Moses, in his blessing on the tribes of Israel, says, —

The Eternal God is thy dwelling-place,
And underneath are the everlasting arms.²

¹ Psalms lxiii. 8.

² Deuteronomy xxxiii. 27.

Having entered into this delightful intercourse with her Beloved, as if fearing it might be interrupted, she says, —

4. I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
That ye stir not up, nor awake my Love,
Until He please.

She has made this same charge to her sisters at previous times, and under similar circumstances ; and she here repeats it as a matter of great import, that they should do nothing to disturb the harmony between her and her Bridegroom.

When Christ is in the midst of His Church she should be careful not to grieve away the Spirit by any discordant questionings or janglings.

When the bride elect was watching for the coming of her Bridegroom to claim her as His own, as she saw Him approaching with such grandeur and magnificence, she cried out in joy, "Who is this that cometh up out of the wilderness?" but now it is the daughters of Jerusalem, as they see her leaning with so much affection upon her Beloved, that ask, —

5. Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness,
Leaning upon her Beloved?

The Bridegroom answers by turning to His
bride, and asserting His claim to her:—

5. Under the apple-tree I awakened thee:
There thy mother was in travail with thee,
There was she in travail that brought thee forth.

“For as soon as Zion travailed, she brought
forth her children.”¹

“Yea, of Zion it shall be said, This one
and that one was born in her.”²

Under the apple-tree she was pledged to
Him; there was her birth-place; there her
mother gave her to Him; there she was
raised up to the joy of the bride; as she said
(ii. 3),—

I sat down under His shadow with great delight.

It was the Lord that brought the Church
out of the wilderness of darkness and sin.

Jacob is the lot of His inheritance.
He found Him in a desert land,
And in the waste howling wilderness;

¹ Isaiah lxvi. 8.

² Psalms lxxxvii. 5.

He compassed him about, He cared for him,
He kept him as the apple of His eye.¹

Christ's Church is as dear to Him now as she was then ; and when she leans upon Him, and trusts in His righteousness, He will support and uphold her with His power and grace.

The acknowledgment of the Bridegroom, in which He claims her as His own, causes her to rejoice, and to seek to strengthen the bond between them. She would have the surety of it in the seal of the covenant. She asks for His constant remembrance, —

6. Set me as a seal upon Thine heart,
As a seal upon Thine arm, —

as the engravings in the breastplate of judgment which Aaron was to bear upon his heart, "when he goeth in unto the holy place, for a memorial before the Lord continually."² And also like the "two stones upon the shoulderpieces of the ephod, to be stones of memorial for the children of Israel."³ Or, as

¹ Deuteronomy xxxii. 9, 10.

² Exodus xxviii. 29.

³ Ibid. xxviii. 12.

the Lord comforted Zion with the assurances, "Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands ; thy walls are continually before me ;" ¹ and again He says, " I will make thee as a signet, for I have chosen thee, saith the Lord of hosts." ²

The seal would be a sign of the marriage-covenant between the Bridegroom and His bride. If the seal were not attached to the covenant, the document would be invalid.

The heart is the seat of the affections and the seat of life ; it was in His heart she wished to live. She would also be a seal upon His arm, that she might be ever before His eyes.

6. For love is strong as death.

Death conquers all life, but it has no power to quench that love.

6. Jealousy is cruel as the grave ;
The flashes thereof are flashes of fire,
A very flame of the Lord.

Jealousy here expresses a very ardent love, and she fears lest anything should come

¹ Isaiah xlix. 16.

² Haggai ii. 23.

between her and her Beloved that would tend to turn Him away from her as the chief object of His affections. But she feels assured, that if she is sealed upon His heart, she will be held there. She is also watchful of herself, and suspicious of everything that would draw her away from Him; as Paul says, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."¹

The Bridegroom responds with an assurance of the depth of His love to her:—

7. Many waters cannot quench love,
Neither can the floods drown it:
If a man would give all the substance of his house
for love,
He would utterly be contemned.

¹ Romans viii. 35, 38, 39.

Paul understood the value of love when he said, "And if I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and if I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing."¹

Neither would all the riches of the world satisfy the longings of Christ's Church, if the blessing of Christ's love were wanting.

The bride, now feeling secure in her Bridegroom's affections, glows with generous love toward her little sister, who she desires may be brought into their communion. She tells her Beloved, —

8. We have a little sister,
And she hath no breasts.

Most commentators suppose that by the "little sister," is meant an allusion, prophetically, to the Gentile nations which were to be brought into Christ's flock. She had not as yet developed, and was without nourishing power; but in time she would grow into full stature, and symmetrical proportions. The promise was, "And they shall declare my

¹ 1 Corinthians xiii. 3.

glory among the nations.”¹ “For thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the nations like an overflowing stream.”²

The bride asks, in view of the present condition of the little sister, —

8. What shall we do for our sister
In the day when she shall be spoken for?

The Bridegroom replies: When she matures,

9. If she be a wall, —

an image which signifies strength having deep and broad foundations, as city walls were built in the days of Solomon, that is, if she is “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the chief corner-stone,” —³

9. We will build upon her a turret of silver.

All through the Song the bride represents the Jewish Church, and is likened to a garden and to a vineyard, and the “little sister,” the Gentile Church, may be the wall which

¹ Isaiah lxvi. 19. ² Ibid. lxvi. 12. ³ Ephesians ii. 20.

shall surround the garden; as the Jewish Church is to be brought into the Christian Church, and not the Christian into the Jewish.

This turret or battlement, like those towers built on the walls for watchmen to guard the vineyards against marauders, the Bridegroom will build up into a palace of strength and beauty; and with its pure light radiating over all, it shall be a comfort and protection to the workers in the garden.

The Christian Church, in its beginnings, was but a poor and insignificant body, but Christ espoused her to Himself, appointed "salvation for walls and bulwarks,"¹ and beautified her into a palace of silver.

The bride must do everything for the advancement of the Bridegroom's kingdom, and He will bless her efforts. If the little sister has but one talent and improves that, He will enlarge it into greater magnitude; and if she has more than one talent and uses them wisely, He will increase their value.

¹ Isaiah xxvi. 1.

9. And if she be a door, —

that is, a gate of entrance for all that is good, and a bar to all that is bad, —

9. We will enclose her with boards of cedar.

As cedar is one of the strongest and most durable of woods, as well as beautiful and fragrant, so will we make her strong and fragrant by shutting out everything that can defile or harm her. "Thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise." ¹

This Song would not have been complete without reference to the Gentile Church, as having part in the marriage to the Bridegroom. When the time came the Bridegroom said to Judah: "Open ye the gates that the righteous nation which keepeth truth may enter in." ²

The bride rejoices in knowing that her Bridegroom will do all He promises for the little sister, and she expresses her confidence by declaring what He has done for her. She says, —

¹ Isaiah lx. 18.

² Ibid. xxvi. 2.

10. I am a wall, and my breasts like the towers
thereof.

He had already built her up into a tower of beauty, and she was happy trusting in Him, and the whole world looked with admiration on this beautiful bride. "And thy renown went forth among the nations for thy beauty, for it was perfect through my majesty, which I had put upon thee, saith the Lord God."¹ He was pleased with His own workmanship, and with her growth in the graces which He had bestowed upon her, and with triumph she could say,

10. Then was I in His eyes as one that found peace.

The Bridegroom and His bride have been talking of the future development of the little sister,—supposed to symbolize the Gentile Church which was yet to be brought into the kingdom of God,—and the Bridegroom has given His promise concerning her. He now speaks of the vineyard within their garden, which represents the Jewish Church.

¹ Ezekiel xvi. 14.

The similes of the vineyard within the garden, and the wall which is to surround it represent His Church universal.

He cheers His bride by telling her how much He regards His vineyard, and what He will do for it: —

11. Solomon had a vineyard at Baalhamon;
 He let out the vineyard unto keepers;
 Every one for the fruit thereof was to bring a
 thousand *pieces* of silver.

Baalhamon was a place famous for its fine vineyards. In Isaiah we read of places "where there were a thousand vines at a thousand silverlings."¹ That probably was the usual rent for a good vineyard. Solomon's vineyard was a valuable one, and had many keepers; but, says the Bridegroom, —

12. My vineyard, which is mine, is before me:
 Thou, O Solomon, shalt have the thousand,
 And those that keep the fruit thereof two hundred.

Solomon has his rent, and those who work receive their pay; but the Bridegroom says, "My vineyard is under my own eye: the

¹ Isaiah vii. 23.

fruit is all mine, and those who work with me, and for me, shall have their reward from mine own hand;" as He says, "I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment; lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day." ¹

This He tells His bride to encourage her in her work for Him, as He is about to leave her for a season; and that she may seek His counsel and advice, who is always ready to listen, and delights to have intercourse with her, He thus addresses her:—

13. Thou that dwellest in the gardens, —
in these gardens, which He has enclosed in one, and set apart for Himself, where her work lies; where she dwells that she may watch and cultivate them, and keep them clean from noxious weeds, which if left would choke the good seed that He has sown, —

13. The companions hearken for thy voice.
These companions (the friends of the Bride-

¹ Isaiah xxvii. 3.

groom) that remain, and are workers in the gardens, they listen with pleasure to thy voice.

13. Cause me to hear it.

It is the same command which Christ has left to His Church: "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatsoever ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit." ¹

"The prayer of the upright is His delight." ² If His directions are obeyed, when He returns to claim His own, He will find the clusters of the vine ripe and ready for the vintage, the pomegranate loaded with its blushing fruit waiting to be gathered, the figs all ripened, and the flowers bursting into bloom; all the chief spices, the henna, and the spikenard, the saffron, the calamus, and cinnamon, with all frankincense, and myrrh, and aloes giving forth their fragrance. Nor will the garden of nuts and the exotics of His introducing be forgotten:

¹ John xv. 7, 8.

² Proverbs xv. 8.

all are in one enclosure, divisions of one garden.

All the branches of Christ's Church in Heaven and on earth constitute one body ; that body is His bride, and He and His bride are one. "I am the vine, ye are the branches : He that abideth in Me, and I in Him, the same beareth much fruit." ¹

Christ the Bridegroom goes to Heaven that He may prepare a place for His bride the Church, to be with Him, where there shall not be any more toil, with fatigue and sorrow and disappointments ; as Christ said to His disciples when about leaving them, "In my Father's house are many mansions ; if it were not so I would have told you ; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself ; that where I am, *there* ye may be also." ²

Filled with these joyful anticipations His bride replies, —

¹ John xv. 5.

² John xiv. 2, 3.

14. Make haste, my Beloved,
And be Thou like to a roe or to a young hart
Upon the mountains of spices.

Whom have I in Heaven but Thee ?
And there is none upon earth that I desire beside
Thee.”¹

“The voice of Thy watchmen ! they lift up
the voice, together do they sing ; for they
shall see, eye to eye, when the Lord returneth
to Zion.”² Then will the day break, and
the shadows flee away when the bride shall
behold the King in His beauty, — his bride,
the lily, no longer among thorns ; but taken
to be forever with the Lord, where she will
feast with Him and drink of the new wine in
His kingdom.³

These fourteen closing verses of the Song
are like the responsive Psalms of David, and
are echoes of loving expressions between the
Bridegroom and His bride. Each seems to
be desirous of strengthening the bond of
union between them. Christ’s everlasting
arms are about His bride the Church, and she

¹ Psalms lxxiii. 25. ² Isaiah lii. 8. ³ Matthew xxvi. 29.

clings to Him. The bride, overflowing with love, seeks to bring into the garden those who are outside of the garden wall. She joins her voice to the voice of the Spirit. "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And he that heareth, let him say, Come. And he that is athirst, let him come: he that will, let him take the water of life freely."¹ "Blessed are they which are bidden to the marriage supper of the Lamb."²

Christ also prays for them who are yet outside: "Neither for these only do I pray, but for them also that believe on me through their word; that they may all be one, even as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us."³

The whole Song is a song of loves,—a picture of God's ineffable goodness and condescension, and showing Him to be the one only God and Saviour, the Husband and the Head of His Church.

In the curse pronounced on woman in the

¹ Revelation xxii. 17.

² Ibid. xix. 9.

³ John xvii. 20, 21.

"Fall," she was told that "her desire was to be ever toward her husband."¹ In the Redemption the curse was removed when Christ honored woman by calling His Church His bride; and now with joy and affection she can say, "His desire is toward me." Christ yearns after His Church more than she can possibly desire Him. A loving bridegroom loves his bride as his own body, and the Song has taught us that Christ loves His Church with a fulness which is above all human love.

If in all the walks of life the Church is ever clinging to her Bridegroom, and His hand is holding her, and leading her, she will find that as a shepherd leads his flock into green pastures and beside still waters, so He is leading her. Whether she is herself at work in her garden, or whether she is superintending the workmen in the vineyard, He is by her side giving her wisdom, strength, and guidance. When He goes with her in her journeys for pleasure and recreation, He will take

¹ Genesis iii. 16.

her where she can breathe the invigorating air of mountains of joy and her eyes can feast on the beauties of the valleys. He will protect her from dangers that lie in her path, and from the wild beasts that lurk about to destroy her. Her soul will be fed with the richest and the choicest of food, for He will take her to feed among the lilies. He will give her grapes from the vineyard, dates from the palm-tree, golden apples, pomegranates, figs, and nuts, and droppings from the honeycomb; and her drink will be wine and milk without money and without price; for as His bride she will feast with Him, and He with her. But if she forgets Him, and does not let Him in when He knocks, affliction and trouble will overtake her, darkness will surround her until she feels her loss, and goes and seeks Him, and then He will be found of her, and He will receive her back to His loving embrace.

For those devout souls who love Him fervently this Song is a bright and heavenly light to lead them into greater confidence

and trust in Him who has taken them into such a close union. Christ has made the Church one with Himself, that she might be "a glorious Church not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing."¹ Washed in the blood of the Lamb, and thus cleansed from all stains of sins; "clothed with the garments of salvation, covered with the robe of righteousness,"² her beauties present themselves before Him, so that He exclaims (iv. 7),

Thou art all fair, my love,
And there is no spot in thee.

When the fulness of the Gentiles, and the re-entering of the Jews shall be accomplished, then will be the consummation of what John saw when in Patmos: "And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of the throne saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He shall dwell with them, and they shall be His

¹ Ephesians v. 27.

² Isaiah lxi. 10.

peoples, and God Himself shall be with them, *and be* their God ; and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes ; and death shall be no more ; neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more : the first things are passed away.”¹

¹ Revelation xxi. 2-4.

MARCH, 1887.

BOOKS

PUBLISHED BY

ROBERT CARTER & BROTHERS,

530 BROADWAY, NEW YORK.

**THE CRISIS OF MISSIONS ; or, The Voice out
of the Cloud.** By the Rev. ARTHUR T. PIERSON, D.D.

16mo \$1.25

"It is as fascinating as a novel, and yet overflowing with facts that make one wonder how it can be possible that such great progress has been made in missions, even during the recent years, and he not have known more of it. This book can but stimulate the followers of Christ to greater love for, and more earnest efforts in, missions." — *Christian Work*.

"This is a book for every Christian to read with prayer and a sincere desire to know his personal duty in this great and glorious work." — *New York Observer*.

"In the little volume before us, the history of missions is unrolled as a scroll, the marvellous providences of God are traced in letters which glow with the intensity of the writer's convictions, the trumpet-call of God's providences to the Christian world is sounded so loud and clear as to reach, one would think, the dumbest ear." — *Baptist Herald*.

"One of the most important books to the cause of Foreign Missions — and through them to Home Missions also — which ever has been written. It should be in every library and every household. It should be read, studied, taken to heart, and prayed over." — *Congregationalist*.

***A. L. O. E. LIBRARY.**

50 vols., 16mo, in a neat wooden case, *net* 28.00

"All these stories have the charm and pure Christian character which have made the name of A. L. O. E. dear to thousands of homes." — *Lutheran*.

ARNOT, Rev. William.

On the Parables. 12mo 1.75

Church in the House; or, Lessons on the Acts of the
Apostles. 12mo 1.50

(1)

BERNARD, T. D.

The Progress of Doctrine in the New Testament. 12mo \$1.25

"The style is absolutely perfect. A broad, deep stream of fresh thought, in language as clear as crystal, flows through the whole devout, instructive, quickening, and inspiring work. Simply as a model of style, every preacher might profitably study it. . . . This volume makes the New Testament a new book to me."—*Rev. T. L. Cuyler, D.D.*

BICKERSTETH, Rev. E. H.

Yesterday, To-day, and Forever. A Poem. Pocket edition, \$0.50; 16mo, \$1.00; 12mo 1.50

"If any poem is destined to endure in the companionship of Milton's hitherto matchless epic, we believe it will be 'Yesterday, To-day, and Forever.'"—*London Globe.*

BLUNT'S Coincidences and Paley's Horæ Pau-

linæ. 12mo 1.50

BONAR, Horatius, D.D.

Hymns of Faith and Hope. 3 vols. 16mo 2.25

Bible Thoughts and Themes. 6 vols. 12mo 12.00

Way of Peace 0.50

Way of Holiness 0.60

Night of Weeping 0.50

Morning of Joy 0.60

Follow the Lamb 0.40

How shall I go to God? 0.40

BOWES, Rev. G. S.

Scripture its own Illustrator. 12mo 1.50

Information and Illustration. 12mo 1.50

BRODIE, Emily.

Jean Lindsay, The Vicar's Daughter 1.25

Dora Hamilton's Choice. 12mo 1.25

Elsie Gordon. 12mo 1.25

Uncle Fred's Shilling. 12mo 1.25

Lonely Jack. 12mo 1.25

Ruth's Rescue. 16mo 0.50

Nora Clinton. 12mo 1.25

The Sea Gull's Nest. 16mo 0.60

Norman and Elsie. 12mo 1.25

Five Minutes too Late 1.25

East and West 0.60

His Guardian Angel 1.25

CHARLESWORTH, Miss M. L.

Ministering Children. 12mo 1.50

" " 16mo 1.00

Sequel to Ministering Children. 12mo 1.50

" " " 16mo 1.00

CHARLESWORTH, Miss M. L., *continued.*

Oliver of the Mill. 12mo	\$1.00
Dorothy Cope, containing "The Old Looking-Glass" and "Broken Looking-Glass." 12mo	1.50

CUYLER, Rev. T. L.

Pointed Papers. 12mo	1.50
Thought Hives. 12mo	1.50
From Nile to Norway	1.50
Empty Crib. 24mo	1.00
Cedar Christian. 18mo	0.75
Stray Arrows. 18mo	0.60
God's Light on Dark Clouds. Flexible, red edges . . .	0.75

"In this beautiful little volume the author presents a grateful offering to the 'desponding and bereaved.' . . . He offers to others what he has tested for himself. The book is written out of a full heart and a vivid experience."—*Presbyterian Review*.

*D'AUBIGNÉ, Dr. Merle.

*History of the Reformation in the Sixteenth Century. 5 vols., 12mo, cloth, in a box	4.50
*History of the Reformation in the Time of Calvin. 8 vols., 12mo, cloth, in a box	8.00

"The work is now complete; and these later volumes, together with the original five, form a library relating to the Reformation of incalculable value and of intense interest. The pen of this master of history gave a charm to everything that he touched."—*New York Observer*.

*A very cheap edition of Reformation in the Sixteenth Century. 5 vols. in one, 890 pages, cloth	1.00
--	------

DICKSON, Rev. Alexander, D.D.

All about Jesus. 12mo	2.00
Beauty for Ashes. 12mo	2.00

"His book is a 'bundle of myrrh,' and will be specially enjoyed by those who are in trouble."—*Rev. Dr. W. M. Taylor*.

"Luscious as a honeycomb, with sweetness drawn from God's Word."—*Rev. Dr. Cuyler*.

DRINKWATER, Jennie M.

Only Ned. 12mo	1.25
Not Bread Alone. 12mo	1.25
Fred and Jeanie. 12mo	1.25
Tessa Wadsworth's Discipline. 12mo	1.50
Rue's Helps. 12mo	1.50
Electa; A Story. 12mo	1.50
Fifteen. 12mo	1.50
Bek's First Corner. 12mo	1.50
Miss Prudence. 12mo	1.50
The Story of Hannah. 12mo	1.50
That Quisset House	1.50
Isobel's Between-Times	1.50

EDWARDS, Jonathan.

*Works. In 4 vols. 8vo \$6.00

"I consider Jonathan Edwards the greatest of the sons of men."

— *Robert Hall.*

FRASER, Dr. D.

Synoptical Lectures on the Books of Holy Scripture. New and revised edition. 2 vols. 12mo

4.50

"The plan is to give a general view of the scope and contents of each book in the Bible. It is designed not for professional students alone, but for all educated Christians. The careful reader will gain from its pages clear ideas of the arrangement, subject-matter, and salient features of the Sacred Scriptures." — *New York Observer.*

GIBERNE, Agnes.

Aimee. A Tale of James II. 12mo 1.50

The Curate's Home. 16mo 1.25

Floss Silverthorn. 16mo 1.25

Coulyng Castle. 16mo 1.50

Muriel Bertram. 12mo 1.50

The Sun, Moon, and Stars. 12mo 1.50

The World's Foundations; or, Geology for Beginners.

12mo 1.50

Through the Linn. 16mo 1.25

Sweetbriar. 12mo 1.50

Duties and Duties. 16mo 1.25

Jacob Witherby. 16mo 0.60

Decima's Promise. 12mo 1.25

Twilight Talks. 16mo 0.75

Kathleen. 12mo 1.50

Daily Evening Rest. 18mo 1.00

Beryl and Pearl. 12mo 1.50

Old Umbrellas. 12mo 0.90

Among the Stars; or, Wonders in the Sky. 12mo 1.50

Madge Hardwicke 1.00

Father Aldur: a Water Story 1.50

GREEN, Prof. Wm. Henry, D.D.

The Argument of the Book of Job Unfolded. 12mo 1.75

"That ancient composition, so marvellous in beauty and so rich in philosophy, is here treated in a thoroughly analytical manner, and new depths and grander proportions of the divine original portrayed. It is a book to stimulate research." — *Methodist Recorder.*

Moses and the Prophets. 12mo, cloth 1.00

"It has impressed me as one of the most thorough and conclusive pieces of apologetics that has been composed for a long time. The critic confines himself to the positions laid down by Smith, and, without being diverted by any side issues or bringing in any other views of other theorists, replies to those positions in a style that carries conviction." — *Professor W. G. T. Shedd, D.D.*

The Hebrew Feasts. 12mo 1.50

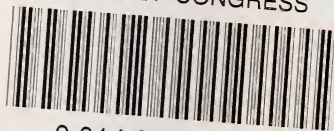
Deacidified using the Bookkeeper process.
Neutralizing agent: Magnesium Oxide
Treatment Date: June 2005

PreservationTechnologies
A WORLD LEADER IN PAPER PRESERVATION

111 Thomson Park Drive
Cranberry Township, PA 16066
(724) 779-2111

B585
1485
H

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 014 329 935 1